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ARGOSY

AUGUST, 1953
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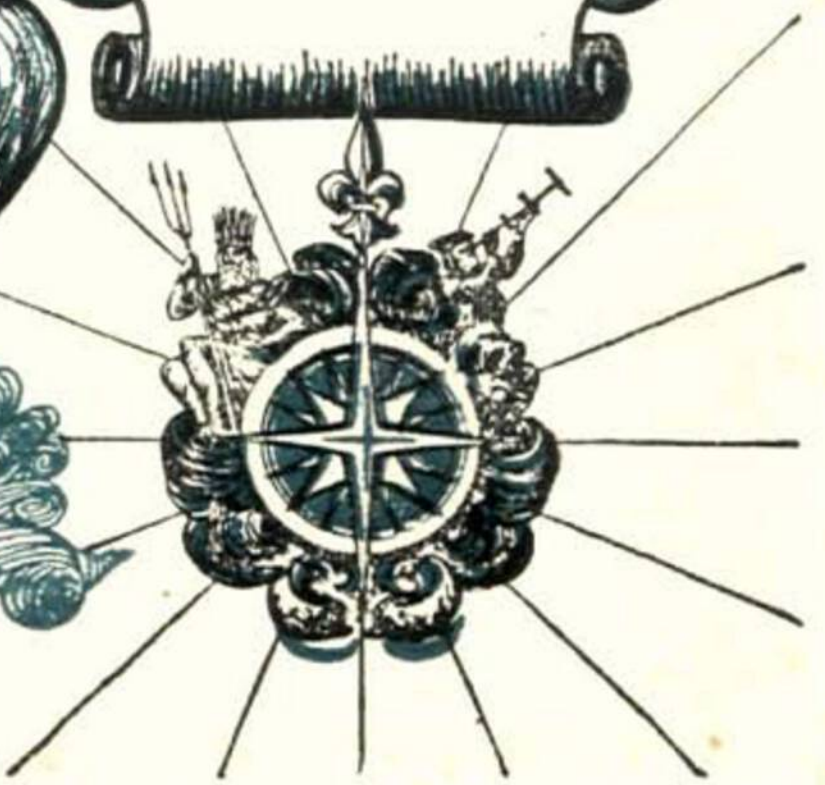

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Bloom

LABURNUM, lilac, honeysuckle, broom,
Syringa, rowan, hawthorn, guelder-rose,
Azalea, rose, and elder—summer glows
About me in sultry smother of scent and bloom
Shut in between the old walls' mossy brick :
Yet, as in the green and golden gloom I dream
In the drowsy dazzle of perfume and colour astream,
An upland odour stings me to the quick—
The shrewd remembered smell, sharp, clean, and cold,
Of peat and moss, where never blossoms blow
Under the shadow of bleak whinstone scars
The summer-long, or only rarely show
Over black pools the sundew's stars of gold
Or grass-of-Parnassus' cold white scentless stars.

WILFRID GIBSON

SUCCESS FOR A SHILLING

She became my mascot—my summer game

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

"IT'LL happen for sure! Sure as thistles prickle!" she said. The little gipsy girl looked up from my hand with great, black eyes. It was the first morning of my holidays, and she was squatting on one side of the high-hedged lane leading to the beach, sitting on her heels in the dusty grass, like a little Berber, smoking a cigarette. She might have been fifteen years old, but she whistled me boldly as I went by.

"Hey! Pretty boy!" she wheedled. "I've a lucky face. Let me change your fortune! Success for a shilling, love for sixpence. Zelpa's the girl!" It was an original approach, and I stopped, sat down beside her in the dust, and held out my hand.

"Success for a shilling, then," I smiled. "D'you smoke much?"

"Yes, pretty boy," she said. "I'm too young for love. This year I smoke, next year I kiss. Will you be in Cornwall next year?"

"No," I said succinctly. "Probably not."

She sighed. "Pity!" she exclaimed. "I marked you down."

"When?" I asked.

"Why, now!" she answered. "This morning, as you passed."

She pored over my palm. Her fingers were very hot. They were not dispassionate fingers, but caressing, searching, penetrating fingers, that ran pensively over the barrier of my skin. It was as though something passed from them into my bloodstream.

She glanced up at me with a secret smile, then started to tell my fortune, beginning with her own enchanting little abracadabra: "It'll happen for sure! Sure as thistles prickle!"

That was our first meeting. Thereafter, I saw her every day, at the same time and place, and for a shilling she told me my fortune—for that day only—and what she said was always true. I began to count on her, to look forward to seeing her on the way to the beach. I enjoyed her shrill, artful hail as I approached: "Hey, pretty boy! *Your success for today! And only a shilling!*"

The first time she was right, I was mildly surprised. There was nothing odd about what she told me—except that it was true.

"You've come down to hire a boat and go fishing for mackerel," she said. "You'll take a boat called the *Girl Pat* and

share it with a man you don't know. He'll be seasick, you'll not. Mackerel ? You'll catch a boatload in the afternoon : in the morning only three. The boatman'll keep too close in. Tell him to go farther out. In the evening, you'll be sunburnt and go to bed early."

It was evidently Kismet ! A stranger shared my boat with me and was duly sick. We caught three mackerel close to the beach before lunch, and in the afternoon, farther off shore, we got five dozen. I also lost my hat : the glare from sun and water burned my face badly, and I went to bed exhausted, immediately after supper.

The next day, when Zelpa saw me, she began at once.

" You're going surfing this morning, pretty boy ! It'll be good. You'll meet a girl in the surf. Afterwards, she'll wear a blue beach-suit, with white spots. I was right yesterday, wasn't I ? I'll be right today, sure as thistles prickle ! But don't go with her to the headland in the evening, pretty boy ! If you do, there'll be trouble. You'll meet her fiancé. They only quarrelled yesterday. Be careful ! "

Everything happened exactly as she said. I had cause to regret that I went to the headland in the evening, but that is another story. Apart from this, her successes went on for six whole days. She became my mascot, my summer game, for a shilling a day. She never made a mistake. Every day, I had my fortune, a small, slight story, rendered certain of fulfilment by the very fact of her previous successes. It was on the seventh day that the blow fell. Zelpa hailed me in the lane as usual. " I'm still right, pretty boy, aren't I ? " she cried, with her dazzling smile.

Taking my hand, she pulled me down beside her and turned it over quickly, as an expert cooks a pancake. But when she looked at it, she gave a little scream of such sheer horror that the hair rose on my scalp. She leaped to her feet, dropped my hand, and covered her face with her arms. " What is it, Zelpa ? " I cried. Behind her arms, Zelpa swayed her head from side to side, moaning.

" No, pretty boy, no ! Please, please ! Not that, not that ! "

I stood up and seized her by the shoulders, grasping her small bones roughly. " Zelpa ! " I cried, suddenly panic-stricken, " you must tell me ! What is it ? "

She uncovered her face and whispered : " Go back to your farm, pretty boy ! Keep to your garden, keep to your bed—anything you like ! But keep away from the sea ! Please keep away from the sea ! "

She turned and ran off up the hill, under the arched trees above the narrow lane, between the high hedges, leaving me utterly unnerved, with a feeling of cold at the tips of my fingers and in the pit of my stomach.

At first, I decided to walk home and stay quiet for the rest of the day—help at the farm, milk the cows, collect eggs, join in the

harvesting. Yet, as I went up the hill, in Zelpa's footsteps, something undermined my resolution. It was strange, clear, compelling, like a voice speaking in my ear, quietly, without the least sinister quality —I listened. It said : " She's just a little gipsy—and you're a grown man. You've only got fourteen days' holiday by the sea—fourteen out of three hundred and sixty-five ! And you throw one of them away just because a little gipsy tells you to keep away from the sea ? Don't be a fool ! Go down to the beach like everyone else.

" What about Doreen ? (Doreen was the girl I had met in the surf on the second day.) She said she'd be there today, watching for you. You don't have to go into the water—keep away from it. Tell her you've a slight chill. Tell her any damned thing, but don't bathe. A gipsy warned you. Remember the warning all day and you'll be all right ! " Before I reached the top of the hill, I turned back and began to retrace my footsteps down to the beach. It was quite clear to me what had happened. I had been rather shamefully panicked by a little girl . . .

Down on the beach, Doreen was waiting for me, alone, but from the first, my mind and even my eyes were concentrated not on her but on the sea. It was as though, far out in the Atlantic, a huge wave was gathering, to be blown for hours, over hundreds of miles, towards my small Cornish beach, in order to rush in and, in a flurry of foam, cut me off, knock me down, stun me, then sigh me back into the great belly of the sea. I was bad company, although Cornwall was under a warm summer sun, with a gentle breeze which carried the tang of salt as well as the scent of gardens. Far up in the blue sky, the mackerel clouds swarmed in stippled myriads. The moving sea reflected the sun, and very slowly, as the afternoon shadows lengthened, it became a seething plain of gold.

The dry white sand beneath our feet and under our bodies when we lay among the dunes, sunning ourselves, was warm and soft, pleasant to run through lazy fingers. The great gulls rode the breeze with exquisite grace and precision, uttering their shrill, sad cries. We picked up the finest shells I ever saw—delicate whorls of white and brown and blue, encrusted with mother-of-pearl. But all I found to do with them was to play, over and over again, the childish game of listening to the sound of the sea by holding them to my ear.

Everything brought me back to the sea. I could think of nothing else, although I tried sometimes to fill my mind with other things in order to hide from it. That I kissed Doreen among the dunes is true—but it was not pleasant. It had an unreal quality about it which was horrible. As we lay together in the sand, among the swaying grass, all I was really conscious of was the distant voice of the sea.

As time passed, I felt, more and more, that I was confined in a contracting area of time, in which crisis must occur. My silences

became longer. Doreen, I think, interpreted them as the silences which come to the happy upon days of sharing, but at last she said : " Johnny—let's go home. It's getting cool."

I felt in me a rising panic. " Let's wait a bit longer," I said.

She misunderstood me, and for a few minutes we kissed again, then she stood up and held out her hands to me. " Get up," she said. " I'll pull you. Let's find somewhere to have tea. I'm cold."

I was cold too, but still clung to my place of safety, away from the sea. Then she said : " I'm going to run on the beach to get warm before I dress. Come on ! "

She ran out of the dip in the dunes where we had been lying, and disappeared. I heard her shout as she raced down the steep slope of sand from the dunes to the beach, but did not follow her. The furies, I suddenly knew, were close to me—and I hid from them, face downwards on the sand, out of sight, but never out of hearing, of the sea. When my time came, I was hardly frightened at all. Suddenly I heard Doreen's voice, urgent and shrill, rising from the beach : " Johnny ! Quick ! Help ! Someone's drowning ! "

I jumped up, clear-headed but leaden-limbed, and ran at top speed to the beach. The tide was three-quarters full, with long, straight breakers piling in, each one climbing a step further up the level sand, depositing fresh white collars of new foam.

Thirty yards out, a man in spectacles, fully dressed, even to a panama hat and a brown tweed jacket, was walking resolutely through the surf towards a woman, who was clinging to an inflated rubber tyre. They were shouting for help. The woman rose with a wave, and I saw that a second man had almost reached her. He swam with the jerky overarm action of a poor swimmer in a panic. The man in the coat began to swim too. His swimming was just as bad.

My God, I thought, as I kicked off my sandals, three of them !

Before either of the men could reach her, the woman made matters worse by abandoning her best hope of safety, her rubber tyre, and as she let go, her hands rose above her head, she splashed wildly, and sank. She could not swim ! Doreen waded out beside me, and as I handed her my shirt, I said grimly : " Run like hell for the life-belt on the dunes, and whistle up all the men you can find."

She left me, and I was alone with everything I had feared since the morning. The current seemed to pull me out. I could feel the undertow beneath the waves, tearing at me, even though the tide was coming in. It grew fiercer as I got farther from the shore.

Everything in me cried : " Don't go ! Turn back and get the life-belt ! It's the only sensible thing to do. You can't save three ! "

I stopped walking and let a few waves sweep over me, but at that moment, the man in the panama shouted shrilly : " Help ! Help ! Come on, for God's sake ! She's drowning ! "

I dived through the next breaker and swam rapidly out over the safety line of the surf, into the broken, heaving water beyond. On the surface, everything was rushing inwards with the tide, but in spite of this, the real pull was not inwards but outwards.

We were at the point where the current of the river met the incoming tide with full force. Coming up to the struggling group in the water, I felt with my feet for the bottom, and found nothing but the swift-running undertow. As the strongest swimmer, I took charge. " Give her to me ! " I shouted. " Swim in until you can stand, and get your breath again. I'll tow her in to you. When we can all stand, we'll drag her through the surf together."

The first man to reach the woman left at once and struck out for the shore. I thought he might get in if he was lucky. The other protested that he couldn't leave his wife. I swore at him and asked him, angrily, if he wanted us all to drown. I told him I was as strong as a bull and could go on swimming for ever. All the time, we were moving out to sea. He left at last, after prejudicing all our chances of survival by his obstinacy. I turned the woman over on her back and began the task of towing her in. She was a great, wallowing seal of a creature, only half-conscious now of what was happening.

I swam hard for five minutes, then looked at the shore. We were appreciably farther from it than before I started. I stopped to get my breath and look around me. As we rose on a wave, I yelled to anyone who was listening : " A boat ! Get a boat ! "

I noticed that my two men had got in successfully and were standing together in the surf.

Two survivors anyway, I thought grimly, and watched the people on shore running towards the landing-stage up river. They had heard me. A boat might get to us in twenty minutes. It was to be a test of luck and stamina, but in my heart I was absolutely certain of the end—that I would drown. Sure as thistles prickle, said a small voice in my brain. We gathered speed. Very soon I reckoned we were nearly a mile out, almost level with the headland at the end of the bay. Rising and falling with the long, smooth swell, it was quite easy to keep my burden afloat, but utterly impossible to attempt to take it anywhere. I had not the strength.

Then suddenly, unbelievably, by watching landmarks on the headland, I got the impression that we were no longer going out but in. It was as though we had reached a point where the ingoing tide had mastered the outflowing current of the river.

I began talking to myself :—We're going in—I said—sure as thistles prickle. Zelpa's phrase, and with it, strangely, the vivid mental picture of Zelpa herself came to me again, and I was encouraged. We continued to drift in for upwards of five minutes, then, to my despair, we started to move out again. It was as though two

opposing forces, one on the shore and one out to sea, were fighting for possession of us. Three times, the currents swung us round and round, back and forth.

I was tiring rapidly when, suddenly, I sensed another floating body in the water near me, turned, and a yard away from me saw—the woman's rubber tyre ! During the second or two in which it was within reach, I managed to seize it. It saved both our lives. Ten minutes later we were picked up by a boat from the fishing jetty . . .

I was none the worse for my long swim, and the woman came round after ten minutes of artificial respiration in the boat. Back on land, someone drove me to the farm, where I slept for twelve hours.

Next day, at about eleven o'clock, my landlady came in : " Your gipsy girl to see you," she said, smiling. " Shall I send her up ? "

I nodded. Holding a bunch of rather tattered wild roses, in came Zelpa. She handed me the flowers and stood silent. Two huge tears, compact and translucent, like drops of dew on a nasturtium leaf, shone in her eyes.

" You were going to drown, pretty boy," she gasped at last, sobbing, " sure as thistles prickle ! But I've got a lucky face : I changed your fortune. I managed to pull you in. Me against the whole damned sea ! Are you glad ? "

There was tremendous pathos in her. Taking her skinny hand in mine, I held it for a moment. The idea may have been ridiculous, but she believed in it, so what could I do ?

" Glad ? " I said. " Of course ! Nobody wants to die."

I looked out of the window towards the sea, calm and smooth in the morning sun, under a blue sky without fleck or stain, and remembered with an inward shudder my long, lone struggle with the tide the evening before. I sighed. " Thank you, Zelpa," I said. It was the least I could do, even not believing her story.

Yet, until I left, every day, one or other of the locals told me that I was the only swimmer they remembered who had ever come in alive after being carried out by a cross-tide as far as the point of the bay. It was a miracle, they said. The owner of the boat that rescued us told me, when I went to say good-bye to him, that he picked us up right over the place where the whirlpool forms at the mouth of the river every flood-tide. " You were lucky to have missed it," he said. " It's usually there by half-tide or just after. Funny thing, too, you were floating in and not out when I picked you up. Everything was specially upside-down that day, sir, it was indeed ! "

* * *

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, *why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces ?*

★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

RING AROUND THE REDHEAD

She had a way, once she looked into his eyes, of stopping his heartbeat

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

THE prosecuting attorney was a lean specimen named Amery Heater. The build-up given the murder trial by the newspapers had resulted in a welter of open-mouthed citizens who jammed the golden oak courtroom.

Bill Maloney, the defendant, was sleepy and bored. He knew he had no business being bored. Not with twelve righteous citizens who, under the spell of Amery Heater's quiet, confidential oratory, were beginning to look at Maloney as though he were a fiend among fiends.

The August heat was intense, and flies buzzed around the upper sashes of the dusty windows. The city sounds drifted in the open windows, making it necessary for Amery Heater to raise his voice now and again.

But though Bill Maloney was bored, he was also restless and worried. Mostly he was worried about Justin Marks, his own lawyer.

Marks cared but little for this case. But, being Bill Maloney's best friend, he couldn't very well refuse to handle it. Justin Marks was a proper young man with a neat moustache and frequent daydreams about Justice Marks of the Supreme Court. He somehow didn't feel that the Maloney case was going to help him very much.

Particularly with the very able Amery Heater intent on getting the death penalty.

The judge was a puffy old citizen with signs of many good years at the brandy bottle, the hundreds of gallons of which, surprisingly, had done nothing to dim the keenness of eye or brain.

Bill Maloney was a muscular young man with a round face, a round chin, and a look of sleepy scepticism. A sheaf of his coarse, corn-coloured hair jutted out over his forehead. His eyes were clear, deep blue.

He stifled a yawn, remembering what Justin Marks had told

him about making a good impression on the jury. He singled out a plump lady juror in the front row and winked solemnly at her. She lifted her chin with an audible sniff.

No hope there. Might as well listen to Amery Heater.

" . . . and we, the prosecution, intend to prove that on the evening of July 10th William Howard Maloney did murderously attack his neighbour, James Finch, and did kill James Finch by crushing his skull. We intend to prove there was a serious dispute between these men, a dispute that had continued for some time. We further intend to prove that the cause of this dispute was the dissolute life being led by the defendant."

Amery Heater droned on and on. The room was too hot. Bill Maloney slouched in his chair and yawned. He jumped when Justin Marks hissed at him. Then he remembered that he had yawned, and he smiled placatingly at the jury. Several of them looked away hurriedly.

Fat little Dr. Koobie took the stand. He was sworn in, and Amery Heater, polite and respectful, asked questions that established Koobie's name, profession, and presence at the scene of the " murder " some fifty minutes after it had taken place.

" And now, Dr. Koobie, would you please describe in your own words exactly what you found ? "

Koobie hitched himself in his chair, pulled his trousers up a little over his chubby knees, and said, " No need to make this technical. I was standing out by the hedge between the two houses. I was on Jim Finch's side of the hedge. There was a big smear of blood around. Some of it was spattered on the hedge. Barberry, I think. On the ground there was some hunks of brain tissue, none of them bigger than a sixpenny piece. Also a piece of scalp maybe two inches square. Had Jim's hair on it, all right. Proved that in the lab. Also found some pieces of bone. Not many."

He smiled peacefully. " Guess old Jim is dead, all right. No question of that. Blood was his, and the hair was his."

Three jurors swallowed visibly, and a fourth began to fan himself vigorously.

Koobie answered a few other questions, and then Justin Marks took over the cross-examination.

" What would you say killed Jim Finch ? "

Many people gasped at the question, having assumed that the defence would be that, lacking a body, there was no murder.

Koobie put a fat finger in the corner of his mouth, took it out again. " Couldn't rightly say."

" Could a blow from a club or similar weapon have done it ? "

" Good Lord, no ! Man's head is a pretty durable thing. You'd have to back him up against a solid concrete wall and bust him

with a full swing with a baseball bat, and you still wouldn't do that much hurt. Jim was standing right out in the open."

"Dr. Koobie, imagine a pair of pliers ten feet long and proportionately thick. If a pair of pliers like that were to have grabbed Mr. Finch by the head, smashing it like a nut in a nut-cracker, could it have done that much damage?"

Koobie pulled his nose, tugged on his ear, frowned, and said, "Why, if it clamped down real sudden like, I imagine it could. But where'd Jim go?"

"That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

Amery Heater called other witnesses. One of them was Anita Hempflet.

Amery said, "You live across the road from the defendant?"

Miss Anita Hempflet was fiftyish, big-boned, and of the same general consistency as the dried beef recommended for Canadian canoe trips. Her voice sounded like fingernails on the fourth-form blackboard.

"Yes, I do. I've lived there thirty-five years. That Maloney person, him sitting right over there, moved in two years ago, and I must say that I—"

"You are able to see Mr. Maloney's house from your windows?"

"Certainly!"

"Now tell the court when it was that you first saw the red-headed woman."

She licked her lips. "I first saw that . . . that woman in May. A right pleasant morning it was, too. Or it was until I saw her. About ten o'clock, I'd say. She was right there in Maloney's front garden, as bold as brass. Had on some sort of shiny silver thing. You couldn't call it a dress. Too short for that. Didn't half cover her the way a lady ought to be covered. Not by half. She was—"

"What was she doing?"

"Well, she come out of the house, and she stopped and looked around, as though she was surprised at where she was. My eyes are good. I could see her face. She looked all round. Then she sort of slouched, like she was going to keel over or something. She walked real slow down towards the gate. Mr. Maloney came running out of the house, and I heard him yell to her. She stopped. Then he was making signs to her, for her to go back into the house. Just like she was deaf or something.

"After a while she went back in. I guessed she probably was made deaf by that awful bomb thing the government lost control of near town three days before that."

"You didn't see her again?"

"Oh, I saw her plenty of times. But after that she was always

dressed more like a girl should be dressed. Far as I could figure out, Mr. Maloney was buying her clothes in town. It wasn't right that anything like that should be going on in a nice neighbourhood. Mr. Finch didn't think it was right, either. Runs down property values, you know."

" In your knowledge, Miss Hempflet, did Mr. Maloney and the dceeased ever quarrel ? "

" They started quarrelling a few days after that woman showed up. Yelling at each other across the hedge. Mr. Finch was always scared of burglars. He had that house fixed up so nobody could get in if he didn't want them in. A couple of times I saw Bill Maloney pounding on his door and rapping on the windows. Jim wouldn't pay any attention."

Justin cross-examined.

" You say, Miss Hempflet, that the defendant was going down and shopping for this woman, buying her clothes. In your knowledge, did he buy her anything else ? "

Anita Hempflet sniggered. " I should say so ! Guess she must've been feeble-minded. I asked around and found out he bought a blackboard and chalk and some kids' books."

" Did you make any attempt to find out where this woman came from, this woman who was staying with Mr. Maloney ? "

" Should say I did ! I know for sure that she didn't come in on the train, or Dave Wattle would've seen her. If she'd come by bus, Myrtle Gisco would have known it. Johnny Farness didn't drive her in from the airport. I figure that any woman who'd live openly with a man like Maloney must have hitch-hiked into town. She didn't come any other way."

" That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

Maloney sighed. He couldn't understand why Justin was looking so worried. Everything was going fine. According to plan. He saw the black looks the jury were giving him, but he wasn't worried. Why, as soon as they found out what had actually happened, they'd be all for him. Justin Marks seemed to be sweating.

He came back to the table and whispered to Bill, " How about temporary insanity ? "

" I guess it's O.K. if you like that sort of thing."

" No. I mean as a plea ! "

Maloney stared at him. " Justy, old boy, are you nuts ? All we have to do is tell the truth."

Justin Marks rubbed his moustache with his knuckle and made a small bleating sound that brought him a black look from the judge.

Amery Heater built his case up very cleverly and very thoroughly.

In fact, the jury had Bill Maloney so definitely electrocuted that they were beginning to give him sad looks—full of pity.

It took Amery Heater two days to complete his case. When it was done, it was a solid and shining structure, every discrepancy explained, everything pinned down. Motive. Opportunity. Everything.

On the morning of the third day the court was tense with expectancy. The defence was about to present its case. No one knew what the case was, except, of course, Bill Maloney, Justin Marks, and the unworldly redhead who called herself Rejapachalandakeena. Bill called her Keena. She hadn't appeared in court.

Justin Marks stood up and said to the hushed court, "Your Honour. Rather than summarize my defence at this point, I would like to put William Maloney on the stand first and let him tell the story in his own words."

The court buzzed. Putting Maloney on the stand would give Amery Heater a chance to cross-examine. Heater would rip Maloney into tiny shreds. The audience licked its collective chops.

"Your name?"

"William Maloney, 12 Braydon Road."

"And your occupation?"

"Tinkering. Research, if you want a fancy name."

"Where do you get your income?"

"I've got a few oddments patented. The royalties come in."

"Please tell the court all you know about this crime of which you are accused. Start at the beginning, please."

Bill Maloney shoved the blond hair back off his forehead with a square, mechanic's hand and smiled cheerfully at the jury. Some of them, before they realized it, had smiled back. They felt the smiles on their lips and sobered instantly. It wasn't good form to smile at a vicious murderer.

Bill slouched in the witness chair and laced his fingers across his stomach.

"It all started," he said, "the day the Army let that rocket get out of hand on the 7th of May. I've got my workshop in my cellar. Spend most of my time down there.

"That rocket had an atomic war-head, you know. It exploded in the hills forty miles from town. The jar upset some of my apparatus and stuff. Put it off true. I was sore.

"I turned around, cussing away to myself, and where my coal-bin used to be, there was a room. The arch leading into the room was wide, and I could see in. I tell you, it really shook me up to see that room there. I wondered for a minute if the bomb hadn't given me delusions.

" The room I saw didn't have any furniture in it. Not like furniture we know. It had some big cubes of dull silvery metal and some smaller cubes. I couldn't figure out the lighting.

" Being a curious cuss, I walked right through the arch and looked round. I'm a great one to handle things. The only thing in the room I could pick up was a gadget on top of the biggest cube. It hardly weighed anything.

" In order to picture it, you've got to imagine a child's hoop made of silvery wire. Then right across the wire imagine the blackest night you've ever seen, rolled out into a thin sheet and stretched tight like a drumhead on that wire hoop.

" As I was looking at it, I heard some sort of deep vibration, and there I was, stumbling around in my coal-bin. The room was gone. But I had that darn hoop in my hand. That hoop with the midnight stretched across it.

" I took it back across to my work-bench where the light was better. I held it in one hand and poked a finger at that black stuff. My finger went right through. I didn't feel a thing. With my finger still sticking through it, I looked on the other side.

" It was right there that I named the darn thing. I said, ' Gawk ! ' And that's what I've called it ever since. The gawk. My finger didn't come through on the other side. I stuck my whole arm through. No arm. I pulled it back out. Quick. Arm was O.K. Somehow it seemed warmer on the other side of the gawk.

" Well, you can imagine what it was like for me, a tinkerer, to get my hands on a thing like that. I forgot all about meals and so on. I had to find out what it was and why. I couldn't see my own hand on the other side of it. I put it right up in front of my face, reached through from the back and tried to touch my nose. I couldn't do it. I reached so deep that, without the gawk there, my arm would have been halfway through my head . . . "

" Objection ! " Amery Heater said. " All this has nothing to do with the fact . . . "

" My client," Justin said, " is giving the incidents leading up to the alleged murder."

" Overruled," the judge said.

Maloney said, " Thanks. I decided that my arm had to be somewhere when I stuffed it through the gawk. And it wasn't in this dimension. Maybe not even in this time. But it had to be somewhere. That meant that I had to find out what was on the other side of the gawk. I could use touch or sight. Maybe I could climb through. It intrigued me, you might say.

" I started with touch. I put my hand through, held it in front of me, and walked. I walked five feet before my hand rammed up

against something. I felt it. It seemed to be a smooth wall. There wasn't such a wall in my cellar.

" There has to be some caution in science. I didn't stuff my head through. I couldn't risk it. I had the hunch there might be something unfriendly on the other side of the gawk. I turned the thing around and stuck my hand through from the other side. No wall. There was a terrific pain. I yanked my hand back. A lot of little blood-vessels near the surface had broken. I dropped the gawk and jumped around for a while. Found out I had a bad case of frost-bite. The broken blood-vessels indicated that I had stuffed my hand into a vacuum. Frost-bite in a fraction of a second indicated nearly absolute zero. It seemed that maybe I had put my hand into space. It made me glad it had been my hand instead of my head.

" I propped the thing up on my bench and shoved lots of things through, holding them a while and bringing them back out. Made a lot of notes on the effect of absolute zero on various materials.

" By that time I was dead beat. I went up to bed. Next day I had some coffee and then built myself a little periscope. Shoved it through. Couldn't see a thing. I switched the gawk, tested with a thermometer, put my hand through. Warm enough. But the periscope didn't show me a thing. I wondered if may be something happened to light rays when they went through that blackness. Turns out that I was right.

" By about noon I had found out another thing about it. Every time I turned it round I was able to reach through into a separate and distinct environment. I tested that with the thermometer. One of the environments I tested slammed the mercury right out through the top of the glass and broke the glass and burned my hand. I was glad I hadn't hit that one the first time. It would have burned my hand off at the wrist.

" I began to keep a journal of each turn of the gawk and what seemed to be on the other side of it. I rigged up a jig on my work-bench and began to grope through the gawk with my coal-tongs.

" Once I jabbed something that seemed to be soft and alive. Those tongs were snatched right through the gawk. Completely gone. It gave me the shudders, believe me. If it had been my hand instead of the tongs, I wouldn't be here. I have a hunch that whatever snatched those tongs would have been glad to eat me.

" I rigged up some grappling hooks and went to work. Couldn't get anything. I put a lead weight on some cord and lowered it through. Had some grease on the end of the weight. When the cord slacked off, I pulled it back up. There was fine yellow sand on the bottom of the weight. And I had lowered it thirty-eight feet before I hit sand.

" On try number two hundred and eight, I brought an object back through the gawk. Justy has it right there in his bag. Show it to the people, Justy."

Justin looked annoyed at the informal request, but he unstrapped the bag and took out an object. He passed it up to the judge, who looked at it with great interest. Then it was passed through the jury. It ended up on the table in front of the bench, tagged as an exhibit.

" You can see, folks, that such an object didn't come out of our civilization."

" Objection ! " Heater yelled. " The defendant could have made it."

" Hush up ! " the judge said.

" Thanks. As you can see, that object is a big crystal. That thing in the crystal is a golden scorpion, about five times life size. The corner is sawed off there because Jim Finch sawed it off. You notice that he sawed off a big enough piece to get a hunk of the scorpion's leg. Jim told me that leg was solid gold. That whole bug is solid gold. I guess it was an ornament in some other civilization.

" Now that gets me round to Jim Finch. As you all know, Jim retired from the jewellery business about five years ago. Jim was a pretty sharp trader. You know how he played his savings so that he owned a little hunk of just about everything in town. He was always after me to let him in on my next invention. I guess those royalty cheques made his mouth water. We weren't what you'd call friends. I passed the time of day with him, but he wasn't a friendly man.

" Anyway, when I grabbed this bug out of the gawk, I thought of Jim Finch. I wanted to know if such a thing could be made by a jeweller. Jim was home, and his eyes popped when he saw it. You know how he kept that little shop in his garage and made presents for people ? Well, he cut off a section with a saw. Then he said that he'd never seen anything like it, and he didn't know how on earth it was put together. I told him that it probably wasn't put together on earth. That teased him a little, and he kept after me until I told him the whole story. He didn't believe it. That made me mad. I took him over into my cellar and showed him a few things. I set the gawk between two boxes so it was parallel to the floor, then dropped my grapples down into it. In about three minutes, I caught something and brought it up. It seemed to be squirming."

Maloney drew a deep breath. " That made me a shade cautious. I brought it up slow. The head of the thing came out. It was like a small bear—but more like a bear that had been made into a rug. Flat like a leech, and instead of front legs it just seemed to have a

million little sucker discs around the flat edge. It screamed so hard, with such a high note, that it hurt my ears. I dropped it back through.

" When I looked around, old Jim was backed up against the cellar wall, mumbling. Then he got down on his hands and knees and patted the floor under the gawk. He kept right on mumbling. Pretty soon he asked me how that bear-leech and that golden bug could be in the same place. I explained how I had switched the gawk. We played around for a while and then came up with a bunch of stones. Jim handled them, and his eyes started to pop out again. He began to shake. He told me that one of the stones was an uncut ruby. It would've made you sick to see the way old Jim started to drool. He talked so fast I could hardly understand him. Finally I got the drift. He wanted us to go into business and rig up some big machinery so we could dig through the gawk and come back with all kinds of things. He wanted bushels of rubies and a few tons of gold.

" I told him I wasn't interested. He got so mad he jumped up and down. I told him I was going to fool around with the thing for a while, and then I was going to turn it over to some scientific foundation so the boys could go at it in the right way.

" He looked mad enough to kill me. He told me we could have castles and cars and yachts and a million bucks each. I told him that the money was coming in faster than I could spend it already, and all I wanted was to stay in my cellar and tinker.

" I told him that I guessed the atomic explosion had dislocated something, and the end-product belonged to science. I also told him very politely to get the devil home and stop bothering me. He did, but he sure hated to leave.

" Well, by the morning of the 10th, I had pretty well worn myself out. I was jittery from no sleep. I had made twenty spins in a row without getting anything, and I had begun to think I had run out of new worlds on the other side of the gawk. Like a darn fool, I yanked it off the jig, took it like a quoit, and scaled it across the cellar. It went high, then dropped lightly, spinning.

" And right there in my cellar was this beautiful redhead. She was dressed in a shiny silver thing. Justy's got that silver thing in his bag. Show it to the people. You can see that it's made out of some sort of metal mesh, but it isn't cold the way metal would be. It seems to hold heat and radiate it."

The metal garment was duly passed round. Everybody felt it, exclaimed over it. This was better than a film. Maloney could see from Amery Heater's face that the man wanted to claim the metal garment was also made in the Maloney cellar.

Bill winked at him. Amery Heater flushed a dull red.

" Well, she stood there, right in the middle of the gawk, which was flat against the floor. She had a dazed look on her face. I asked her where she had come from. She gave me a blank look and a stream of her own language. She seemed mad about something. And pretty upset.

" Now what I should have done was pick up that gawk and lift it back up over her head. That would have put her back in her own world. But she stepped out of it, and like a darn fool I stood and held it and spun it, nervous like. In spinning it, I spun her own world off into some mathematical equation I couldn't figure.

" It was by the worst or the best kind of luck, depending on how you look at it, that I made a ringer on her when I tossed the gawk across the cellar. Her make-up startled me a little. No lipstick. Tiny crimson beads on the end of each eyelash. Tiny emerald-green triangles painted on each tooth in some sort of enamel. Nicely centred. Her hair-do wasn't any crazier than some you see every day.

" Well, she saw the gawk in my hands, and she wasn't dumb at all. She came at me, her lips trembling, her eyes pleading, and tried to step into it. I shook my head, hard, pushed her back, and set it again in the jig. I shoved a steel rod through, holding it in asbestos mittens. The heat beyond the blackness turned the whole rod cherry-red in seconds. I shoved it on through the rest of the way, then showed her the darkened mitten. She was quick. She got the most horrified look on her face.

" Then she ran upstairs, thinking it was some sort of joke, I guess. I noticed that she slammed right into the door, as though she expected it to open for her. By the time I got to her, she had figured out the knob. She went down the path towards the gate.

" That's when nosy Anita must have seen her. I shouted. She turned round, and the tears were running right down her face. I made soothing noises, and she let me lead her back into the house. I've never seen a prettier girl or one with a better . . . I mean her skin is translucent, sort of. Her eyes are enormous. And her hair is a shade of red that you never see.

" She had no place to go, and she was my responsibility. I certainly didn't feel like turning her over to the welfare people. I fixed her up a place to sleep in my spare room, and I had to show her everything. How to turn on a tap. How to turn the lights off and on.

" She didn't do anything except cry for four days. I gave her food that she didn't eat. She was a mess. Worried me a lot. I didn't have any idea how to find her world again. No idea at all.

Of course, I could have popped her into any old world, but it didn't seem right.

" On the fourth day I came up out of the cellar and found her sitting in a chair looking at a copy of *See* magazine. She seemed very much interested in the pictures of the women. She looked up at me and smiled. That was the day I went into town and came back with a heap of clothes for her. I had to show her how a zipper worked and how to button a button."

He looked as if that might have been fun.

" After she got all dressed up, she smiled some more, and that evening she ate well. I kept pointing to things and saying the right name for them.

" I tell you, once she heard the name for something, she didn't forget it. It stayed right with her. Nouns were easy. The other words were tough. About ten that night I finally caught her name. It was Rejapachalandakeena. She seemed to like to have me call her Keena. The first sentence she said was, ' Where is Keena ? '

" That is one tough question. Where is here and now ? Where is this world, anyway ? On what side of what dimension ? In which end of space ? On what twisted convolution of the time stream ? What good is it to say, ' This is the world ' ? It just happens to be our world. Now I know that there are plenty of others.

" Writing came tougher for her than the sounds of the words. She showed me her writing. She took a piece of paper, held the pencil pointing straight up, and put the paper on top of the rug. Then she worked that pencil like a pneumatic hammer, starting at the top right corner and going down the page. I couldn't figure it until she read it over and made a correction by sticking in one extra hole in the paper. I saw then that the pattern of holes was very precise—like notes on a sheet of music. She went through the school readers like a flash. I was buying her some arithmetic books one day, and when I got back she said, ' Man here while Billy gone.' She was calling me Billy. ' Keena hide,' she said.

" The only thing missing was the gawk and, with it, Keena's chance to make a return to her own people. I thought immediately of Jim Finch. I ran over and pounded on his door. He undid the chain so he could talk to me through a five-inch crack, but I couldn't get in. I asked him if he had stolen the little item. He told me that I'd better run to the police and tell them exactly what it was that I had lost, and then I could tell the police exactly how I got it. I could tell by the look of naked triumph in his eyes that he had it. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

" Keena's English improved by leaps and bounds, and pretty soon she was dipping into my texts on chemistry and physics. She

seemed puzzled. She told me that we were like her people a few thousand years back. Primitives. She told me a lot about her world. No cities. The houses are far apart. No work. Everyone is assigned to a certain cultural pursuit, depending on basic ability. She was a designer. In order to train herself, she had had to learn the composition of all fabricated materials used in her world.

" I took notes while she talked. When I get out of this jam I'm going to revolutionize the plastics industry. She seemed bright enough to be able to take in the story of how she suddenly appeared in my cellar. I gave it to her slow and easy.

" When I was through, she sat very still for a long time. Then she told me that it was impossible that her departure should go unnoticed. She said that probably at the moment of her disappearance, all the resources of a great people were being concentrated on that spot where she had been standing talking to some friends. She told me that some trace of the method would be found, and that they would then scan this world, locate her, and take her back.

" I asked her if it would be easier if we had the gawk, and she said that it wasn't necessary, and that if it was, she would merely go next door and see Jim Finch face to face. She said she had a way, once she looked into his eyes, of taking over the control of his involuntary muscles and stopping his heartbeat.

" I gasped, and she smiled sweetly and said that she had very nearly done it to me when I had kept her from climbing back through the gawk. She said that everybody in her world knew how to do that.

" Well, as May turned into June and June went by, Keena got more and more confident of her eventual rescue. As I learned more about her world, I got confident of it too. In a few thousand years we may be as bright as those people. I hope we are. No wars, no disease.

" And the longer she stayed with me, the more upset I got about her leaving me. But it was what she wanted. I guess it's what I'd want if somebody shoved me back a thousand years B.C. I'd want to get home, but quick.

" On the 10th of July I got a phone call from Jim Finch. His voice was all quavery like a little old lady. He said, ' Maloney, I want to give that thing back to you. Right away.' Anything Jim Finch gave anybody was a spavined gift horse. I guessed that the gobblies were after him like Keena had hinted.

" So I just laughed at him. Maybe I laughed to cover up the fact that I was a little scared, too. What if some world he messed about with dropped a future-type atomic bomb back through the gawk into his lap ? I told him to burn it up if he was tired of it.

" I didn't know Jim could cuss like that. He said that it wouldn't

burn, and he couldn't break it or destroy it in any other way. He said that he was coming out to throw it across the hedge into my garden right then.

" As I got to my front door, he came running out of his house. He carried the thing as if it was going to blow up.

" Just as he got to the hedge, I saw a misty circle in the air over his head. Only it was about ten feet across. A pair of dark blue, shiny pliers, with jaws as big as the judge's desk there, swooped down and caught him by the head. The jaws snapped shut so hard that I could hear a sort of thick, wet, popping sound as all the bones in old Jim's head gave way all at once.

" He dropped the gawk and hung limp in those closed jaws for a moment, then he was yanked up through that misty circle into nothingness. Gone. Right before my eyes. The misty circle drifted down to grass level and then faded away. The gawk faded right away with it. You know what it made me think of? Of a picnic where you're trying to eat, and a bug gets on your arm and bothers you. You pinch it between your thumb and forefinger, roll it once, and throw it away. Old Jim was just about as important to those blue steel jaws as a hungry red ant is to you or me. You could call those gems he got crumbs, I guess.

" I was just getting over the shock in my own front garden when Timmy came running over, took one look at the blood, and ran back. The police came next. 'That's all there is to tell. Keena is still around, and Justy will bring her in to testify tomorrow."

Bill Maloney yawned and smiled at the jury.

Amery Heater got up, stuck his thumbs inside his belt, and walked slowly and heavily over to Bill.

He stared into Bill's smiling face for ten long seconds. Bill shuffled his feet and began to look uncomfortable.

In a low, bitter tone Amery Heater said, " Gawks! Golden scorpions! Tangential worlds! Blue jaws! " He sighed heavily, pointed to the jury, and said, " Those are intelligent people, Maloney. No questions! "

The judge had to pound with his gavel to quiet the court. As soon as the room was quiet, he called an adjournment until ten the following morning.

When Bill Maloney was brought out of his cell into court the next morning, the jurors gave each other wise looks. It was obvious that the young man had spent a bad night. There were puffy areas under his eyes. He scuffed his heels as he walked, sat down heavily, and buried his face in his hands. They wondered why his shoulders seemed to shake.

Justin Marks looked just as bad. Or worse.

Bill was sunk in a dull lethargy, in an apathy so deep that he didn't know where he was, and cared less.

Justin Marks stood up and said, " Your Honour, we request an adjournment of the case for twenty-four hours."

" For what reason ? "

" Your Honour, I intended to call the woman known as Keena to the stand this morning. She was in a room at the Hotel Hollyfield. Last night she went up to her room at eleven after I talked with her in the lounge. She hasn't been seen since. Her room is empty. All her possessions are there, but she is gone. I would like time to locate her, your Honour."

The judge looked extremely disappointed.

He pursed his lips and said in a sweet tone, " You are sure that such a woman actually exists, Counsellor ? "

Justin Marks turned pale, and Amery Heater chuckled.

" Of course, your Honour ! Why, only last night . . ."

" Her people came and got her," Bill Maloney said heavily. He didn't look up.

The jury shifted restlessly. They had expected to be entertained by a gorgeous redhead. Without her testimony, the story related by Maloney seemed even more absurd than it had seemed when they had heard it. Of course, it would be a shame to electrocute a nice clean young man like that, but really you can't have people going about killing their neighbours and then concocting such a fantasy about it . . .

" What's that ? " the judge said suddenly.

It began as a hum, so low as to be more of a vibration than a sound. A throb that seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Slowly it increased in pitch and in violence, and if the judge had any more to say on the subject, no one heard him. He appeared to be trying to beat the top of his desk in with the gavel. But the noise couldn't be heard.

Slowly climbing up the audible range, it filled the court. As it passed the index of vibration of the windows, they shattered, but the falling glass couldn't be heard. A man who had been wearing glasses stared through empty frames.

The sound passed beyond the upper limits of the human ear, became supersonic, and every person in the courtroom was suddenly afflicted with a blinding headache.

It stopped as abruptly as a scream in the night.

For a moment there was a misty arch in the solid wall. Beyond it was the startling vagueness of a line of blue hills. Hills that didn't belong there.

She came quickly through the arch. It faded. She was not

tall, but gave the impression of tallness. Her hair was the startling red of port wine, her skin so translucent as to seem faintly bluish. Her eyes were halfway between sherry and honey. Tiny crimson beads were on the tip of each eyelash. Her warm, full lips were parted, and they could all see the little green enamelled triangles on her white teeth. Her single garment was like the silver metallic garment they had touched. But it was golden. Without any apparent means of support, it clung to her lovely body, following each line and curve.

She looked round the court. Maloney's eyes were warm blue fire. " Keena ! " he gasped. She ran to him, threw herself on him, her arms around his neck, her face hidden in the line of jaw, throat, and shoulder. He murmured things to her that the jury strained to hear.

Amery Heater, feeling his case fade away, was the first to recover. " Hypnotism ! " he roared.

It took the judge a full minute of steady pounding to silence the spectators. " One more disturbance like this, and I'll clear the court," he said.

Maloney had come to life. She sat on his lap, and they could hear her say, " What are they trying to do to you ? "

He smiled peacefully. " They want to kill me, honey. They say I killed Jim Finch."

She turned, and her eyes shrivelled the jury and the judge. " Stupid ! " she hissed.

There was a little difficulty in swearing her in. Justin Marks, his confidence regained, thoroughly astonished at finding that Bill Maloney had been telling the truth all along, questioned Keena masterfully. She backed up Maloney's story in every particular. Maloney couldn't keep his eyes off her. Her accent was odd, and her voice had a peculiar husky and yet liquid quality.

Justin Marks knuckled his moustache proudly, bowed to Amery Heater, and said, " Do you wish to cross-examine ? "

Heater nodded, stood up, and walked over slowly. He gave Keena a long and careful look. " Young woman, I congratulate you on your acting ability. Where did you get your training ? Surely you've been on the stage ? "

" Stage ? "

" Oh, come now ! All this has been very interesting, but now we must discard this dream-world and get down to facts. What is your real name ? "

" Rejapachalandakeena."

Heater sighed heavily. " I see that you are determined to maintain your silly little fiction. That entrance of yours was

somehow engineered by the defendant, I am sure." He turned and smiled at the jury—the smile of a fellow conspirator.

" Miss So-and-so, the defence has all been based on the idea that you come from some other world, or some hidden corner of time, or out of the woodwork. I think that what you had better do is just prove to us that you do come from some other world." His voice dripped with sarcasm. " Just do one or two things for us that we common mortals can't do, please."

Keena frowned, propped her chin on her fist. After a few moments she said, " I do not know completely what you are able to do. Many primitive people have learned through a sort of intuition. Am I right in thinking that those people behind that little fence are the ones who decide whether my Billy is to be killed ? "

" Correct."

She turned and stared at the jury for a long time. Her eyes passed from face to face, slowly. The jurors were oddly uncomfortable.

She said, " It is very odd. That woman in the second row. The second one from the left. It is odd that she should be there. Not very long ago she gave a poison, some sort of vegetable-base poison, to her husband. He was ill for a long time, and he died. Is that not against your silly laws ? "

The woman in question turned pale green, put her hands to her throat, rolled her eyes upwards, and slid quietly off the chair. No one made a move to help her. All eyes were on Keena.

Some woman back in the courtroom said shrilly, " I knew there was something funny about the way Dave died ! I knew it ! Arrest Mrs. Watson immediately ! "

Keena's eyes turned towards the woman who had spoken. The woman sat down suddenly.

Keena said, " This man you call Dave. His wife killed him because of you. I can read that in your eyes."

Amery Heater chuckled. " A very good trick, but pure imagination. I rather guess you have been prepared for this situation, and my opponent has briefed you on what to do, should I call on you in this way."

Keena's eyes flashed. She said, " You are a most offensive person."

She stared steadily at Amery Heater. He began to sweat. Suddenly he screamed and began to dance about. Smoke poured from his pockets. Blistering his fingers, he threw pocket-knife, change, note-clip on the floor. They glowed dull red, and the smell of scorching wood filled the air.

A wisp of smoke rose from his tie-pin, and he tore that off,

sucking his blistered fingers. The belt-buckle was next. By then the silver coins had melted against the wooden floor. But there was one last thing he had to remove. His shoes. The eyelets were metal. They began to burn the leather.

At last, panting and moaning, he stood surrounded by the cherry-red pieces of metal on the floor.

Keena smiled and said softly, " Ah, you have no more metal on you. Would you like to have further proof ? "

Amery Heater swallowed hard. He looked up at the open-mouthed judge. He glanced at the jury.

" The prosecution withdraws," he said hoarsely.

The judge managed to close his mouth.

" Case dismissed," he said. " Young woman, I suggest you go back wherever you came from."

She smiled blandly up at him. " Oh no ! I can't go back. I went back once and found that my world was very empty. They laughed at my new clothes. I said I wanted Billy. They said they would transport him to my world. But Billy wouldn't be happy there. So I came back."

Maloney stood up, yawned, and stretched. He smiled at the jury. Two men were helping the woman back up into her chair. She was still green.

He winked at Keena and said, " Come on home, honey."

They walked down the aisle together and out of the golden oak doors. Nobody made a sound or a move to stop them.

Anita Hempflet, extremely conscious of the fact that the man who had left her waiting at the altar thirty-one years before was buried just beyond the corn-hills in her vegetable garden, forced her razor lips into a broad smile, beamed around at the people sitting near her, and said in her high, sharp voice, " Well ! That girl is going to make a lovely neighbour ! If you folks will excuse me, I'm going to take her over some fresh strawberry preserves."

* * *

NEGATIVE EXPOSURE

Marie Tempest was once at a party where she felt the conversation had gone a bit too far. A lady tore a reputation to tatters and then turning to Marie Tempest said, " What I always say is, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

The great actress smiled sweetly. " I don't agree," she said. " I always think people who live in glass houses should undress in the dark . . ."

W. MACQUEEN-POPE, *Shirtfronts and Sables*

Captain Stratton's Fancy

OH some are fond of red wine, and some are fond of white
And some are all for dancing by the pale moonlight;
But rum alone's the tipple, and the heart's delight
Of the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of Spanish wine, and some are fond of French,
And some'll swallow tay and stuff fit only for a wench;
But I'm for right Jamaica till I roll beneath the bench,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are for the lily, and some are for the rose,
But I am for the sugar-cane that in Jamaica grows;
For it's that that makes the bonny drink to warm my copper nose,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of fiddles, and a song well sung
And some are all for music for to lilt upon the tongue;
But mouths were made for tankards, and for sucking at the bung,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of dancing, and some are fond of dice,
And some are all for red lips, and pretty lasses' eyes;
But a right Jamaica puncheon is a finer prize
To the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some that's good and godly ones they say that it's a sin,
To troll the jolly bowl around, and let the dollars spin;
But I'm for toleration and for drinking at an inn,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are sad and wretched folk that go in silken suits,
And there's a mort of wicked rogues that live in good reputes;
So I'm for drinking honestly, and dying in my boots,
Like an old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

JOHN MASEFIELD

GEORGE'S FIRST AFFAIR

It must have been midsummer madness

by NORMAN EDWARDS

IT was not often that His Grace the Duke of Rustington felt bored when entertaining his old friend George St. George at dinner. But that particular evening George was in one of his moods, and although he appeared to enjoy his food, and there was one moment when the Châteauneuf-du-Pape seemed to prompt him to conversation, he was, generally speaking, dull.

When the table had been stripped, and the butler had left them, and the decanter had travelled on its old, old orbit for the third time, and George still remained more or less mute, the duke could no longer restrain himself.

"You're damn quiet tonight," he said to his guest in a rather irritated voice. "What's the matter with you? Liver? Money? A woman . . . ?"

George St. George spluttered a little—he was drinking port when the duke spoke—and his face went a shade redder than was usual for him at that time of the evening.

"Don't talk about women," he said, dabbing at his lips with what he thought was his napkin but which happened to be one of the four enormous white handkerchiefs he always carried about with him. "Or girls, for that matter," he added. "Pass the port, please."

The duke grinned as he obliged. It was all right. George at last—at long last—was waking up.

"Go on with you," chortled the duke, "go on with you, you old satyr! Ever since you fell in love with that little waitress when you were at Eton you've been interested in women. And girls."

George St. George put his empty glass on the table with meticulous care; the only outward sign of annoyance he showed was the appearance of a blush which spread across his forehead.

"You're wrong about that little waitress," said George in a low voice. "Quite wrong. She was not my *first love*."

"Frightfully sorry, George, but I thought . . ."

"Dukes shouldn't think," interrupted George, with the deliberate and spiteful intention of irritating his host. "Dukes, like pretty girls, should be decorative but dumb."

The Duke of Rustington received this outburst with equanimity. He drank his own port, and liked it; and George, realizing that he had made a very silly and very cheap remark, went redder than ever in the face.

"What I meant to say," he continued in a sulky voice, "was that dukes—or anyone else for that matter—should never suppose that thinking can be of any help in affairs of the heart."

"Quite right, George," agreed the duke. "If one could think clearly one would never fall in love."

"If one could think clearly," snorted George, "one would never fall into anything. Not even into debt."

"That," said Rustington, after a long pause, "I doubt."

"So do I," grinned George. "But d'you want to know about the first girl I ever fell in love with?" George looked more cheerful. He drank port. He twiddled the stem of the glass between a fat thumb and lean forefinger.

"Harry," he said, "believe it or not, but the first time I ever fell in love was with—a fairy."

There was a long period of silence in the dining-room; then the duke cleared his throat and asked, "A fairy, did you say, George?"

"Yes."

"What—er—sort of fairy?"

The bloodshot eyes of George St. George gleamed with sudden warmth. "A lovely one," he replied softly. "A very lovely one."

"Young or old, George?"

"Young, of course. Old fairies are never lovely."

"Where did you meet her, George?"

"In a park."

"Good place to look for fairies."

"I didn't *look* for one. I *met* one."

"How?"

"By accident."

"Look here, George," said the duke, after another long pause, "I don't want to cross-examine you, so why not tell the story your own way?"

George thought for a while; and then he shrugged his fat shoulders, sighed heavily, sipped his port, coughed, lit a cigar, and then nodded. "All right, Harry," he conceded, "but it's not a funny story, this time."

The Duke of Rustington bent his head slightly. "Go on, George," he urged in a gentle and persuasive voice, "go on, old boy. I'd . . . I'd like to hear how you—er—met a fairy in a park."

Suddenly George St. George became alive. His massive frame quivered; he sat upright in his chair; his face became animated

by an inward glow which had nothing to do with the port he had imbibed, was imbibing, and would, in the near future, continue to imbibe.

"You see, Harry," said George, a note of boyish enthusiasm apparent in his voice as well as in his manner "you see, Harry, I was very young at the time. M'tutor had been very harsh with me—very harsh—and I was not enjoying my summer holiday."

"I was fagging for you at the time," interrupted the duke, "and I remember . . ."

"And a shockin' little so-and-so you were," snarled George, who loathed interruptions. "Quite, quite shockin'. And if you interrupt me again . . ."

"Sorry, very sorry, George."

A few seconds later George St. George put down his glass and began again.

"You may or may not remember the summer of the year I'm talkin' about," he said in a far-away voice, "but if you don't, you must take my word for it that the weather was perfect—absolutely perfect. And as my guardian was out of the country that summer, I'd accepted an invitation to stay with a cousin of mine—a distant cousin, I'll admit, and a cove I didn't care for very much—who lived in Warwickshire. He was rich by marriage, if you know what I mean, and he had quite a decent place near the River Avon, not very far from the town where Shakespeare was born."

"I know it, George," muttered the duke, as he passed the decanter in answer to a look in his guest's eyes. "The Arden country—forest of Arden . . ."

"Well," continued George, after sniffing and scrutinizing the wine in his glass, "well, I arrived rather latish one night—it was Midsummer night, to be exact—and found that this cousin of mine had waited up for me, because the servants had gone off duty.

"Well, we had a lot to talk about; and as he was only a few years older than me, and seemed to know something about port—oh thanks, Harry, I don't mind if I do—we spent quite an agreeable time. Until my cousin showed the bad streak I always knew he had in him: he broke a glass, blamed me, lost his temper, and stalked off to bed. Or stumbled would be more accurate.

"Anyhow, there was I, wide awake, feeling very pleased with life, and in a mood to be kind and genial. And nobody to talk to."

"That must have been simply horrible for you," commented the duke, as he smothered a yawn.

"You're quite right," agreed George seriously. "I didn't feel like bed, so I opened the door onto the terrace and—well, I nearly fell over . . ."

"Fresh air get at you, George?"

"No. The beauty of the night."

"What?"

"The beauty of a perfect midsummer night. My cousin's park was small but well wooded, and in the moonlight it looked—well, it looked . . ."

"Beautiful, George?"

"Yes, Harry. And the deer . . . and the glimpse of the river through the trees . . ."

George St. George choked a little: emotion and port made his face flame; and his hand shook slightly as he put down his glass.

"I wandered out into the park," continued George, "and decided I'd never known such a perfect evening. The deer were tame. They didn't seem to mind me being near them. And suddenly, as I moved round a very old oak tree, I saw her in the moonlight . . . lying on her back, reclinin' on a grassy mound."

"Saw her? Who, George?"

"The fairy."

"Look, George, tell the truth: were you sober?"

"As a judge."

"That's no answer. I have known one or two judges who—"

"I tell you, Harry, I was sober."

"Then it must have been midsummer madness."

For the next two or three minutes George drank port, smoked his cigar, and sulked in silence. And at last the duke could bear it no longer. He smiled, and said in a conciliatory voice: "No need to be huffy, George. After all, you must admit that it's a surprising thing—to hear an old friend tell you in all seriousness that he blundered into a fairy in—"

"I didn't *blunder*," snapped George.

"Well—came across her. A fairy."

"Correct," said George. "But if you don't believe me, I may as well go home and . . ."

"Now calm down, calm down," urged the duke. "Don't be so touchy. Tell me, how was she dressed—this—er—fairy of yours?"

"As fairies are invariably," answered George in his most withering voice.

"A short, fluffy tulle skirt; bare arms and a close-fittin' bodice thing—all white of course—and in her hair a glitterin' diamond star."

"No wand?"

"As a matter of fact, she had. I noticed it. Lyin' on the grass beside her."

"Pretty?"

"Exquisite. A blonde. Very young. But she looked a bit under the weather, if you know what I mean."

"I don't. Fairies under the weather have never come my way."

"Well, she gave me the impression—especially when she spoke—that—er, she'd had a few. Giggled a lot."

"Good Lord! Do you mean your fairy was tiddly?"

"Don't be so plebeian, Harry. Faintly—ah! intoxicated is what I mean."

"Been to a party in Fairyland, eh?"

"Possibly. I didn't ask her."

"And you?"

"I've told you. Sober as . . . well, sober."

"Go on, George."

George St. George drew gently on his cigar and then examined the butt with a critical eye. "There are some people," he said in a detached sort of voice, "who still believe that one shouldn't smoke when drinkin' port. But that's all my eye and—"

"George."

"Yes, Harry?"

"The fairy. I want to hear about her."

George coughed a little, drank port, and glanced up at the ceiling. "Ah yes, Harry, yes, yes, yes. The fairy. Well—to cut a long story short . . ."

"I wish you would, George."

"To cut a long story short, I sat down beside her and commented on the beauty of the night: Midsummer Eve and all that. And when I'd introduced myself . . ."

"'Bottom, thou art translated,'" said the duke softly to himself. But apprehending that George had heard him, he passed the decanter. "Only quoting, George, only quoting," he said hurriedly. "Please go on, old boy. I'm . . . I'm most interested."

But George was not to be put off. "Quoting from *what*?" he barked.

"*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, George."

"Ah Harry, how right you are! She *was* a dream.

"She didn't mind you talking to her, George?"

"Why no, of course not. I mean, when I'd explained why I was walkin' in the park; why I was so surprised and delighted to meet someone—someone to talk to, of course—she stopped telling me to—er—go home."

"Go home?"

"Yes. She thought I was . . . well, no need to go into that: I talked her out of it."

The Duke of Rustington sat back in his chair and chuckled; and then, much to the indignation of George St. George, he began to quote in a voice imitative of a certain famous actor:

You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong;
Come not near our fairy queen.

George St. George gaped at his host. "You feelin' all right, Harry?" he asked anxiously. He glanced keenly at the decanter, then at the duke's glass, and then at his host again. Rustington looked a bit sheepish; but suddenly he laughed. "Sorry, George," he muttered. "Don't mind me. Get on with your story."

"Not much more to tell," answered George. He yawned. "We sat there, on that grassy bank, for quite a while; and although she hadn't much to say for herself, I found her company extremely agreeable."

"I bet you did," said the duke under his breath. "But didn't she tell you anything about Fairyland?"

"She didn't have to," said George coyly, and after a longish pause. "You see, she—er—liked me. Liked me so much that I was—ah, in Fairyland myself, Harry."

The duke slowly drank port. When he put his glass down, there was a glitter in his eye, and a hissing quality in his speech when he again addressed his guest, "Are you telling me . . . are you having the damn nerve to hint to me . . . that your amorous behaviour was . . . was encouraged?" Rustington spluttered, gasped a little, and then relapsed into silence.

His eyes searched George's glowing face with intense interest, jealousy, and incredulity. But George didn't care. He was lost in the woods—the evergreen woods of youth and reminiscences of youth.

"I was young, she was young—and I had a tongue in my head even in those days," he said with rather charming simplicity. "And the night was made for . . ."

"Don't say it!" the duke almost screamed. Clichés upset him, and put his nerves on edge almost as badly as when he heard stiff wrapping-paper ripped in half or a bored child slide a wet finger down a window-pane.

George sighed heavily. "All right," he said. "Let it go. But it *was*, Harry, it *was*! And the night passed all too swiftly. Much too swiftly. And when she got up, and said that the Queen of the Fairies had ordered her to be home by dawn at the latest, I was *desolated*. You see, she was my first—er—love."

"You were *what*?"

"Desolated. Upset. Unhappy. You know."

"I don't," snapped the duke. "I've never felt like that at dawn. Tired, yes, but . . ."

"Never mind, never mind," interrupted George irritably. "The point is, I was upset at her having to go. I tried to date her up—I mean, make a rendezvous with her for the next night . . ."

"Did she, George?"

"Yes and no, Harry. She said she'd like to, but it all depended on the Queen of the Fairies—whether she could cajole the old—er—the Queen to let her have another night off. Of course, I asked her to tell me her name. She was a bit coy about that. Said she'd tell me next time we met. And with that I had to kiss her—I mean, I had to say 'Au revoir' and let her go."

"Not with that accent, I hope!"

The duke looked moodily at his old friend. "What a liar you are," he muttered. "What a gifted liar! Of course, you never met her again?"

"Oh yes," answered George with a yawn as he got up—rather unsteadily—from the table. "Oh yes. When she brought me my morning tea, she said her name was Mildred and that the Servants' Fancy Dress Ball she'd been to had been awfully nice, and that . . ."

"Get out!" cried the duke, standing up suddenly, his voice harsh with emotion. "Go home! Go home!"

George went. But with a faint and pleased and reminiscent grin on his lips.

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

You will find, on page 144, Argosy's third Prize Crossword Competition in which there will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. When you have completed the crossword puzzle *in ink*, please write your name and address in capital letters in the space below the square and cut out together the square and attached coupon.

Post your entry to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 3, 3, Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.) to arrive not later than Thursday, August 6, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale Oct. 9.

SALUTE TO CRICKET

The very names of a cricket bat and ball make English fingers tingle

WILLIAM HAZLITT

Last Mundaye youre Father was at Mr. Payn's and plaid at Cricket and came home please anuf for he struck the best Ball in the Game and whishd he had not anny thing else to do he ould play at Cricket all his Life.

MARY TURNER, *of East Hoathly, Sussex, in a letter to her son, September*, 1739

Bowled Over!

When you wake up in the morning on the day of "the great match,"
And rush to the venetians for a peep,
And the rain-flouts flog the windows, and belabour the soaked thatch,
And the world of leaves with water is a-weep;
When you think of sodden wickets, and of sawdust heaps, and steam,
And instead of donning flannels with a shout,
You want to use strong language, and get back to bed, and dream—
Oh! that is when a cricketer feels "Out!"

E. J. MILLIKEN, *How's That?* 1896

Well Played

"Capital game—well played—some strokes admirable," said the stranger, as both sides crowded into the tent, at the conclusion of the game.

"You have played it, sir?" inquired Mr. Wardle, who had been much amused by his loquacity.

"Played it! Think I have—thousands of times—not here—West Indies—exciting thing—hot work—very."

"It must be rather a warm pursuit in such a climate," observed Mr. Pickwick.

"Warm—red hot—scorching—glowing. Played a match once—single wicket—friend of the Colonel—Sir Thomas Blazo—who should get the greatest number of runs. Won the toss—first innings—seven o'clock a.m.—six natives to look out—went in; kept in—heat intense—natives all fainted—taken away—fresh half-dozen ordered—fainted also—Blazo bowling—supported by

two natives—couldn't bowl me out—fainted too—cleared away the Colonel—wouldn't give in—faithful attendant—Quanko Samba—last man left—sun so hot, bat in blisters, ball scorched brown—five hundred and seventy runs—rather exhausted—Quanko mustered up last remaining strength—bowled me out—had a bath and went to dinner."

"And what became of what's-his-name, sir?" inquired an old gentleman.

"Blazo?"

"No—the other gentleman."

"Poor Quanko—never recovered it—bowled on, on my account—bowled off, on his own—died, sir." Here the stranger buried his countenance in a brown jug, but whether to hide his emotion or imbibe its contents, we cannot distinctly affirm.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Pickwick Papers*

Obstruction

You know Lord's? Well, once I played there,
And a ball I hit to leg—
Struck the umpire's head and stayed there,
As a nest retains an egg.
Hastily the wicket-keeper
Seized a stump and prised about:
Had it gone two inches deeper
He would ne'er have run me out.
This I minded all the more
As my stroke was well worth four.

HARRY GRAHAM, *Ruthless Rhymes*

Excellent Sport

This day will be played on Walworth Common a great Cricket match between 11 gentlemen of the Borough of Southwark and 11 gentlemen of High Kent and Blackman; the wickets to be pitched at one o'clock.

The gentlemen who play this match have subscribed for a Holland smock of one guinea value, which will be run for by two jolly wenches, one known by the name of The Little Bit of Blue (the handsome Broom Girl) at the fag end of Kent Street, and the other, Black Bess, of the Mint. They are to run in drawers only, and there is excellent sport expected.

Capt. Vinegar, with a great many of his bruisers and bull-dogs, will attend to make a ring, that no civil spectators may be incommoded by the rabble.

Penny London Morning Advertiser, June 11th, 1744

On the Green

No doubt "summer sets in with its usual severity," every year, but at last the right golden days return, and then cricket simply has to be. It springs from the meadows. It adorns them like the ox-eye daisy and the tall buttercups around the playing space, or indeed on it; its costume, its array, are exquisitely seasonable.

We have lost the old custom of wakes and fairs very largely in the country, but here we have a charming substitute, and something which does not wholly rest within the limits of the state of the game or scores from other grounds.

I know a lady from the Far East who will never master the laws of cricket and whose chief attainment as a spectator of the details is to realize a difference between the batting of Jim Smith and James Parks.

Yet on a sunny afternoon she takes her way into some near cricket ground, whether it is Lord's or one with the village church at one end and the duck-pond and cowsheds at the other, to come under the spell of the green and the sun, the serious art of the performers in the middle, the pleased intensity of the watching crowd, the absence of heartless hurry, and the presiding spirit of peaceful recreation.

Many of us have something like these feelings concerning cricket. We hardly ever pursue the matter to the extent of going to see a match, but the idea brings us a silent delight, if only for a moment.

EDMUND BLUNDEN, *Is It Still Our National Game?*

Close of Play

Across green taffeta the bowler runs
With circling arm. The red ball magnifies
Down to the clicking bat. The balls seem suns
Whose planets are the watchers' turning eyes!
The lazy lie with sweet grass in their lips;
The ladies twirl their Japanese sunshades.
All day the ball leaps down, the scratched bat clips;
All day the soft oppressive sun persuades.

The evening offers up the scent of grass
Scorched sweet; the light is little but dies long.
From the pavilion a man will sometimes pass,
Between his lips a drowsy butt of song.
As the moon rises, a great orange glass,
Crickets play on, with clicking sweet and strong.

GEORGE MOOR, *Beauty and Richness*

CHERRY RIPE

The laughing voices scattered like a crackle of crows

by H. E. BATES

AT noon the seven women stacked their hoes by the fence and sat on a bank of grass and broom, at the end of the sugar-beet field, where the track came up by a wood of hazels.

"I'm goin' a-sit more in the lew o' the wood today," Ma Hawkins said. "I sat out there yesterday and the wind cut holes in me breeches."

"Puzzle it to cut through mine," Poll Sankey said. "I got two pair on. Me thick 'uns and me thin 'uns."

"Hark at old Poll!" they all said. "Hark at Poll!—Poll's off again."

Blue as water, pale and never still, a field of flax stirred with limp and tender waves below the field of sugar beet, cool, green and glittering in the midday sun. Columns of sweet chestnuts in fresh dusty yellow flowers were piled high beyond it, crested with breezy summer cloud that swept big brushes of shadow across the long blue hollow.

"I'll git me joint out," Poll said. "Who wants a cut off me joint? Don't all speak at once—and them as open their mouths don't say nothing!"

In the breezy air, cool for July, the laughing voices of the women were scattered like a crackle of crows.

"Hark at Poll!" they said. "Hark at Poll! Hark at her!"

Ma Hawkins filled her mouth with beetroot until her lips were scarred with purple. "You can see where we bin today," she said. "We made a mark on 'em today."

"Jist as well," Liz Bordan said. "A mite higher and they'll strangle us."

Thistle and bindweed and dock and fat-hen lay curled like a grey cast of snake-skins down the rows of beet, dying in the sun.

"Gaw!—she must think I'm slimming!" Poll said. "Look at it—me bit o' bacon and half a yard o' rind. Just like our Ma. Scrabs up the first thing she sees and puts it between two bits o' bread and calls it dinner. One day she'll pack the cat up."

Liz Bordan, grey and straight as a slit fence rail, said in a thin-smeared voice that Poll had enough on her to last till Michaelmas if she never had another mite in her lips.

"Me?" Poll said. "There's no fat on me. It's what I'm saving up to get married with."

She slapped her hands on the tight broad front of her body, running them over the great curves of her hips and down the taut bulge of her thighs. Her eyes were fresh and black as berries in a big happy face of burnt rose colour, with strong white teeth and masses of tangled blue-black hair. When she laughed the sound came up from down in her throat like a coarse burst of brass, a deep, fleshy trumpet-call.

"I'm just ripening off," Poll said. "That's all. That's how they like it."

"It ain't all fruit as'll keep," Liz Bordan said.

"No, and it ain't all fruit as wants to."

"Good old Poll," they said.

"Where's Phebe?" Ma Hawkins said. She was like a bag of sun-brown leather with a few windy bristles of grey sticking out from under the apron she had tied over her head.

"In the wood," they said.

"Pauline'll soon be here," Cath Johnson said. "It'll soon be time for Pauline to be here with the baby." She, the youngest, was eating pale red-orange cherries and hanging others, in pairs, on her small delicate ears, under close brown cushions of side hair.

"Anybody dancing tonight?" Poll said. "I think I'll go. Help to fill the floor up."

Phebe Harlow, a tall, high-cheeked girl with long fine legs and pale brown arms, came out of the wood and sat on the bank and began to comb her hair. The hair was blonde-yellow and smooth, and she combed it down with slow, fine strokes until it fell in a curtain over her bent face.

"Dancing tonight, Phebe?" Poll said.

"I might."

"I think I will if Harry'll take me," Poll said.

All of them except Phebe Harlow laughed about Harry. Everybody knew about Harry. Harry came across by the field once a day, perhaps twice, a gnome on an orange tractor, a little man with a flat black head and piercing, doleful blue eyes that searched the skirts of the women and roamed along the line of bodies bowed against cross-winds as they hoed the fields.

"Harry'll come if I ask him," Poll said.

"Ask him!" they said. "Go on—ask him!"

"See me with Harry," she said.

"Ask him—go on, Poll, ask him!" they said. "He'll be by at one o'clock. He'll be coming by to the hay-field."

"See me dancing with Harry," Poll said. "His head wouldn't come up to my belt. I'd laugh like a drain."

"See what he says—ask him," they said.

Pairs of cherries danced cool orange on Cath Johnson's ears and Phebe Harlow shook back her hair from her face and fingered pale gold strands of it left shining on the comb. Wind caught her hair and separated it suddenly into transparency, letting sunlight through it, turning it more white than yellow. She looked about to be blown away on skeined soft wings.

"You want to be careful about laughing at men," she said. "That's the way it starts."

"Not with me," Poll said. "I'm laughing all the time and it's never started yet."

"My sister's gal up at Ulcumbe laughed at a chap," Liz Bordan said. "Met him in a pub and laughed at his neck-tie. She and two more gigglin' bits o' work stood and laughed at his neck-tie. Afore she knew where she were she married him and now she's got four."

"That's what I want to do," Poll said. "Laugh and have thousands of kids. Thousands of 'em. I've got to have kids. I've got to have a man."

"Harry!" they said.

"He's so little I'd lose him in bed," she said.

"Hark at Poll!" they said. "Poll's off again!"

"You be careful about laughing," Phebe Harlow said.

A running breeze clapped down the rows of sugar-beet, turning the leaves over so that they whitened briefly in the sun. It caught at the skirts and the dinner-papers of the seven women and blew Phebe Harlow's hair into lighter transparency. It freshened gustily about Ma Hawkins, who said she could feel it blowing holes in her trousers again. It rattled the brown pods of broom seeds, and it brought finally the cough of a tractor, coming up the track from below the wood of hazels.

"Harry!" the women said. "Poll!—it's Harry. Get ready."

"He's got eyes," Poll said. "He can see me, can't he?—there's enough of me."

Phebe Harlow stopped combing her hair and stretched herself on the bank, her arms making a cushion under her head, her legs apart. The breeze crept about her, stirring the edge of skirt and hair, seeming suddenly to blow the lids of her eyes shut, covering them with a veil of olive-blue.

Poll Sankey slapped her thighs and said, "Come on, Harry. Some of us are laying down waiting a'ready—oh! Harry, I want

you like a Sunday joint—Harry, you're my leg o' lamb—Harry, I'm hungry for my leg o' lamb—"

"Gal, for Gawd's sake," Ma Hawkins said, "they'll hear you down at Benacre."

Everybody giggled except Phebe Harlow.

A quiver like another run of wind went through the women as Cath Johnson said the tractor was coming through the gate and Phebe'd better make up her lips for Harry. Her neat young lips were already wet with cherry-stain and now she began to turn them a redder, richer orange with smears of bitten fruit. Her ears were delicate and looked mischievous when the pairs of cherries trembled about them, and she called:

"Who wants a cherry? Any more for a cherry before Harry comes?"

"Save 'em for Harry," Poll Sankey said.

"You save 'em for yourself," Liz Bordan said. "Let him buy his own."

The tractor, like a creeping orange sloth beaded at the head with two piercing eyes of pale sky-blue, drew up by the bank with a dying roar. Having pushed an oil-black cap to the back of his head and scratched a mop of ageless mouse-brown hair, Harry spat at the earth, showing cheerful teeth of gaping brown.

"Ah! here's Harry!—how's Harry?" they all said, as if Harry were now a surprise to them. "Windy enough for you, Harry?"

"All depends what it's a-blowin'," Harry said.

His fierce little eyes roved from the cherried ears of Cath Johnson to Phebe Harlow's long, sleeping brown legs and then to Poll Sankey lifting her big mocking breast and laughing at him with fleshy lips and black rolling eyes.

"Had y' dinners?" Harry said.

"Just waitin' for the leg o' lamb, Harry," Poll said.

All the women laughed and said Poll was off again, and Harry laughed too, his eyes giving off fierce, male spurts, blue and dancing.

"Don't want a nice bit o' sauce on it, I reckon?" Harry said.

"You got plenty," Liz Bordan said, and Harry, with cracked teeth and a low, droll glint of blue from half-closed eyes that suddenly leapt open again to a wink, said:

"Ain't got enough to waste on old mutton, know that."

"Then you keep it to yourself!" she said. "You ain't so young and tender."

"I'm very like a lot tender'n you think," Harry said. "Here and there—"

" He's tender-hearted," Poll said. " That's one thing. Ain't you, Harry ? We all know he's tender-hearted."

" There's ways o' finding that out," he said.

" Harry ! " Cath Johnson said. " How do you like my earrings, Harry ? I just got my lips up for you, Harry ! How d'ye like them, Harry ? "

" Looks like some young heifer-calf bin a-lickin'—" Harry said. With little screams, Cath Johnson fired cherry-stones that fell about the tractor without touching him.

He surveyed the seven women with glinting, hungry eyes that reflected the white and blue of cloud and sky, settling at last on Phebe Harlow, lying with body now wind-flattened on the bank, blonde and sleepy in the sun.

" Dancing tonight, Harry ? " Poll said.

" Poll wants you to go with her, Harry ! " Cath Johnson said. " She wants you to take her ! "

" Not me. I don't want splinters in my knees," Poll said.

" Don't mind sittin' out," Harry said.

" Nor anywheres else ! " she said and when all the women had laughed again Harry cocked his hat farther on the back of his head, letting his eyes stop roving for a moment or two, and said :

" I think I'll take Janey. Eh, Janey ? Janey's my drop."

Nobody knew how old Janey was. Janey looked tired. Her forehead, foreshortened and flattened, was screwed into monkey-like wrinkles above which her straight dark hair was cut low and angular.

" Eh, Janey ? Come dance with me, Janey ? "

Janey smiled.

" Janey's not your type," Poll said. " Janey's slimming. You want something with a bit more meat on. You don't want lean girls like Janey. Does he, Janey ? "

Janey smiled.

" If they're too fat it ain't so well," Harry said. " And if they're too lean it ain't so well. I like a bit o' lean and then a bit o' fat and then a bit o' lean and then a drop o' gravy."

" You don't want much do you ? " Poll said.

" No," Harry said, " but it don't stop me lookin' in the shop window."

" Gawd, man, you talk enough for fifty," Ma Hawkins said. " You're allus wound up."

" Got seven on y' t' answer back," Harry said, " that's why."

" That hay'll be cooked afore you git up to that field, that's a sure thing," Liz Bordan said. " But that don't matter, does it ? You're in no hurry, are you ? "

" I wadn' born in 'urry," Harry said.

Down the track, beyond the gently sputtering tractor, at the edge of the hazel copse, a girl appeared with a green and yellow scarf tied over her head, young and prettily dark and pushing a pram.

"It's Pauline," Cath Johnson said. "It's Pauline with the baby."

Ma Hawkins said to Harry, with dry tartness:

"And she don't want it poisoned, neither. Not with tractor stink. Git back to work."

"Work, they call it," Liz Bordan said. "Sittin' on their backsides all day."

Harry faced the women squarely, masculine, perky-eyed, undefeated and with roving curiosity, and said, well, he supposed he'd better be thinking of getting on.

"Thinkin'!" Liz Bordan said. "Don't fer Gawd's sake start thinkin'."

"See y' at the dance then, Poll?" he said.

"Not me," Poll said. "I got lumbago in both knees now."

"I'll rub 'em for you," Harry said. "What about Phebe? Ain't bin a word out o' Phebe."

"Phebe's having her beauty sleep," Poll said.

"There's people who ought to git more o' that," Harry said.

"They ought," Poll said. "But it's one thing to go to sleep and another to wake lookin' any different."

"You ought to know," Harry said.

"Git back to work," Liz Bordan said. "For Gawd's sake. I'll be burned if you don't jaw wuss'n all the women."

"Yes, git back!" they all said to him. "For Heaven's sake. And let them work as want to work."

Harry, as if at last he caught a change, a chill or a sourness in the air, let in his gears and moved slowly away up the track, the orange tractor trailing a light blue cloud. As he did so he cast one final look at the women, the rows of beet, and the weeds dying about the field, and called:

"Don't reckon there'll be much sugar in the beet this year."

"Ain't likely, is it?" Ma Hawkins yelled after him, "with you breathin' on it?"

Cath Johnson ran to meet the baby, and what Harry said was never heard.

"Oh! here's my man!" Poll Sankey said. "Let me have him. This is the one for me. He's not down to sleep, is he?"

"He's sitting up," Cath Johnson said.

"There's a man for you," Poll Sankey said. "Look at him. There's a man. There's my beauty."

The women, crowding about the baby as if he were some sort of idol, securely bound by straps, on an altar of pillows, made

sounds like pigeons. His mother unstrapped him, and Poll Sankey took him up. She too made pigeon noises into his face and took him away to the bank with her, sitting down there and putting him on her lap.

"My man's growing, isn't he?" she said softly. "Oh! he grows—he grows every time I see him. I think I'll wait for him—I can wait for you, my beauty, can't I? It won't be long."

"How's his teeth?" Ma Hawkins said.

The young mother smiled and said his teeth were beautiful. They were coming through fast now, she said, and Phebe Harlow sat up at last, drowsy-eyed, looking at her. Everybody knew there was a soldier in it somewhere, she thought, and she began combing her hair again with soft, long, thoughtful strokes, as if wondering who the soldier was.

Then Ma Hawkins said: "He's a handful now, I'll be bound You'll have your hands full now, this summer."

"I had seven afore I turned thirty," old Mrs. Godden said. "If you want to talk about handfuls—" Her mouth, open to speak for the first time, was specked at its quivering edges with fragile crumbs. Her hands held the air like gentle claws grasping to regain something that had been snatched away from her. Against the young mother and the cherry-ears of Cath Johnson she was stony and dry, like a scarred rock hewn a long time from earth.

"You beauty!" Poll Sankey said. "Oh! you sweet beauty!"

Cath Johnson came to dangle cherries before the baby's face, bewildering him, and then Poll Sankey lay on her back, letting him lie and crawl across her big fat breast, laughing at him with enormous, rolling eyes, shaking him gently against the sky.

"You're my man, aren't you?" she said. "You're the man for me."

In the hot sun a crackle of broom pods woke Liz Bordan, dozing on the grass. Old Mrs. Godden began to sharpen the edge of her hoe with short keen strokes of a file, her hands crabbed over like claws that had fossilized. Ma Hawkins and Janey got up to fetch their hoes, Janey staring at the baby, eyes unsmiling under low brows. Phebe Harlow finished combing her hair at last and tied it up with a big handkerchief of spotted blue, tying it from the back, as none of the other women did, with the knot on the crest of her forehead, and then spreading it out in wings.

"I'll be burned if they ain't growed while we bin sittin' there," Ma Hawkins said. She stared down the rows of beet, weed-choked, and prepared to attack them with a sort of despairing savagery. "That's come out hot, too. I can feel it burn the seat o' me breeches."

"You go hot and cold quick for an old 'un," Liz Bordan said.

One by one the women stood waiting with their hoes, until at last Poll Sankey, lying on the bank with the baby on her chest, remained the only one not ready.

"Aren't you comin', Poll?" they said. "Be tea-time afore we know where we are."

"One more minute with my man," Poll said. "My beauty."

"I'll put him in his pram and sit him up," Pauline said, "and then he can watch us coming up the rows."

Poll Sankey held the baby for a few seconds longer, dancing him against her breast and then against the sky, laughing.

"You'll git the child spoilt," Liz Bordan said.

"Ah! let's spoil him. Who wouldn't?" Poll said. "That's what he's for."

"Give him to me now," his mother said.

When she had taken him up and he was sitting in his pram again the women began at last to hoe down the rows of beet, in light wind and sun, towards the hollow of flax that waved like water. Clouds rose like pure white smoke over the sweet chestnut, casting brushes of running shadow. In the clear air there was a sound of hoes beaten on stone and earth and from beyond the hazel wood the sweep of a hay-turner in another field.

And sometimes the child would lift his voice in the afternoon, crowing at the summer air. And as they heard it the women would stop in their hoeing and laugh, and Poll Sankey would stop and laugh louder than the rest, with her voice that was like a trumpet, and wave her hand.

"There's my man!" she would say. "You can hear him from here! There's my man—my beauty!"

* * *

BUTTONS

There was an old skinflint of Hitching
Had a cook, Mrs. Casey, of Cork;
There was nothing but crusts in the kitchen,
While in parlour was sherry and pork.
So at last Mrs. Casey, her pangs to assuage,
Having snipped off his buttonses, curried the page;
And now, while that skinflint gulps sherry and pork
In his parlour adjacent to Hitching,
To the tune blithe and merry of knife and of fork,
Anthropophagy reigns in the kitchen.

WALTER DE LA MARE

NEPTUNE'S HORN

"For my boy," Steve said thickly, "a small golden fish from Chinaland"

by KERMIT ROLLAND

EMMA was a big woman, tall and lean, with a taut, weather-beaten face and hard thighs like a man's. She customarily dressed in a loose, kitchen-stained gingham dress and a pink nightcap, cotton hose rolled down to her ankles and down-at-heel black slippers. The pink nightcap was an incongruous touch; someone once suggested that a greasy Stetson would become her better, or perhaps a headband with a feather stuck in it.

Now she stalked along a hot, narrow, cobbled street, disdaining the small shade cast by the juttings and weathered stone furbelows of the ancient tenements.

"No-good liar!" she chanted to herself. "Damn little brat! Skin him proper!" She raked aside a strand of grey-black hair that straggled from beneath the nightcap.

Since mid-morning she had prowled the littered slum streets and the bottle-strewn open spaces of her neighbourhood, searching for her twelve-year-old son. It was nearly noon, and as yet she had found no one who would admit to having seen him.

Her way had led her from her home (five flights up with the bathtub in the kitchen and cockroaches flattened under the edge of the ragged linoleum), down Pitt Street to the Public Library, through the sparse public park that adjoins it, past the cloudy wading pool, and at last into that section of Lower Manhattan where the deep waters of the East River flow to meet the Mediterranean.

It was somewhere around here, Emma remembered, here on the waterfront, that Petey told her he was going to meet that crazy old man who would show him where to free the goldfish.

"Damned, scabby goldfish!" she muttered.

The brassy noontide sun drove her temporarily into the black shade of a deserted tenement doorway where she stood peering out into the street like a Sioux in ambush. A thin draught of air, faint and damp as a wind from a distant sea, crept through the empty passage and touched her wet back.

She remembered how Steve had brought the troublesome

goldfish home two nights before ; stumbling up the dark stair-well after midnight, singing a drunken old-country song at the bottom of his big voice and clutching a beer glass half filled with water. In the glass tossed the small fish.

" It's for my boy ! " Steve roared happily as he brushed through the narrow doorway and filled the kitchen with the aroma of hops. " A small golden fish for Petey, for Petey the poet, for Petey the Longfellow ! "

He set the glass down on the table so awkwardly, though he tried to be gentle, that some of the water slopped out. Then he sank into a wooden chair and began his song again. But he couldn't remember the words, and his voice drifted off into a lonesome monotone.

Awakened by the noise, Petey came tiptoeing into the kitchen in his underwear. He moved quietly to the table and, leaning half his length across the tattered oilcloth, pressed his small, sleepy face close to the glass. He watched soberly as the terrified goldfish tried to butt its way through the bottom of the glass.

Petey was small for his twelve years, and angular in frame. His arms and legs were skinny and his sharp-featured face bore an ascetic cast so often to be seen in the faces of those who suffer from malnutrition. In his red-gold hair could be read a legacy from Steve ; but in the stringy angularity of his body he was more like Emma.

To Emma, Petey had always been an odd, infuriating child. Unlike the other ferret-like children who scrambled about in the tenement passages or screamed at one another in the streets and open spaces during kick-the-can and cat-baiting, Emma's son spent his time alone—hunting for curious pebbles in the scrubby park, splashing about by himself in the wading pool, or, on the wintry days, staring dreamily into picture-books of gods and goddesses in the Public Library.

Petey had not always been so alone. Until Emma intervened, screaming imprecations at the pair of them, he had treasured a single, brief friendship with an old pedlar named Goldfinger.

Seated close to Goldfinger on his broken-down seltzer waggon, he had been encouraged to hold the reins while the pedlar's derelict grey horse stumbled along the cobbled route it had followed for twenty years on the Lower East Side. It was a nearly wordless companionship because of the difficulties of language, but they often smiled and nodded at one another as if to show that talk wasn't really necessary between friends.

Petey's friendship with the pedlar endured until Emma found out about it. Then, while the horrified Goldfinger looked on, she

whipped her son in the street. " Damn you ! " she shouted, " I'll teach you to mess around with a dirty foreigner ! "

As disturbing to Emma as Petey's impossible friendships were the fantastic stories he sometimes brought home from his solitary adventuring : the discovery in the face of a boarded-up tenement of a secret door which opened onto a clean, sunlit meadow of millet where larks sang and silver chubs flashed in a small brook ; the finding in the park of a magic golden ring which, when placed upon a finger, rendered the wearer invisible and able to perform with immunity all manner of deeds and pranks.

The day after the incident with Goldfinger, Petey announced in great excitement to his parents that he had been captured by pirates down by the river that afternoon.

" They made me go with them," he related breathlessly, " all the way to the China Sea. It was terrible."

" Shut up your lying ! " said Emma. " You were at the Library. I seen you through the window. Now get to bed." She lifted her hand to strike him.

Steve tried to intervene, but she cuffed her son and sent him off. " No supper for you ! " she shouted after him.

Later, while Emma was below, quarrelling with the landlord about a broken pipe in her kitchen, Steve sneaked into his son's room with bread and milk and listened gravely for half an hour while Petey related in vivid detail his encounter with the Orientals.

Steve felt bitter about Emma's domination of his son but he had never dared to risk a family breach by disputing it. Inarticulate himself, and afflicted with a splinter-tongued bully for a wife, he assuaged his loneliness and his discontent with beer, when he could get it, and sometimes considered seriously whether it might not be better after all for Petey to escape to the China Sea with his pirates.

With drunken pride he now smiled across the table at his son. " For my boy," he said thickly, " a small golden fish from China-land."

" *Stop it !* " Emma had been standing by, regarding the two of them, silently gathering her wrath. Now she measured it out in broken invective.

" Drunk old man ! " her face twitched. " No-good old man ! Spending money on a dirty little fish, no-good fish ! Coming home drunk with no money, only a fish, and talking crazy nonsense to his boy ! "

Steve's beery amiability wavered.

" Shut up, too ! " he countered. But his heart wasn't in it.

Then, in an attempt to reassert his long-lost authority, he lurched to his feet and struck out wildly at his wife with the flat of

his hand. The effort cost him his balance and he pitched onto the floor. He lay quietly with his head on the ragged linoleum.

Emma touched him with the toe of her black slipper. Then she turned to Petey. "Throw out the fish!"

Petey regarded her with dismay. "No, Ma."

Emma advanced on him with her hand upraised.

"Where, Ma?" Petey asked quickly, retreating.

"It don't matter. Just get rid of it."

"In the river?" Petey asked hopefully. "It'll live in the river."

"All right," Emma said. "In the river. In the morning."

To Emma, Petey was part of a never-to-be-ended indenture to disappointment and disaster, undertaken thirteen years ago when marriage and a foggy-headed notion of romance had brought her from a solid and secure New Jersey home to this ravaged neighbourhood.

Although she was now a creature of cold spirit and hostile demeanour, she had at that time offered herself to the vigorous and romantic Steve Grobe and to the floods of life with a timid and guilty rapture. But since her gift was a poor thing, and grudgingly given besides, life had rejected her and moved away, stranding her with a worthless husband and a queer child on an arid and rubbly island.

Hating everything which had brought her to this place, hating everything which kept her there, she ranged untrammelled within the cage of her own great strength, foolishly unmindful of the wind which blows between the stars.

Just after dawn that next morning, Petey dressed hurriedly in his faded, tan corduroys and his plimsolls and took the goldfish in the glass over to the East River. But he brought it back again an hour later, talking excitedly about a man he had met at the river's edge.

"The man told me it was against the law to put the goldfish in the East River. He acted like a policeman."

Hurrying his narrative along before he should be interrupted, he said, "If I can go with him tomorrow he said he'd show me the place where the goldfish live." There was an open appeal for belief in his voice.

Emma regarded the tale with suspicion. It wasn't as improbable as some of his stories, she had to admit, but she suspected he'd made up this one, too—about the policeman or whatever—probably thinking she'd change her mind and let him keep the fish. But she wouldn't, she decided. Petey with his wild talk and mad ways and Steve with his hang-over both needed a lesson, and she intended to see that they got it.

"Can I go, Ma?" Petey persisted. "Can I go with the man tomorrow and let him show me about the fish?"

Emma decided the lesson could be delayed another day.

"Put the dirty thing on the fire-escape until morning. But remember: I want you back here early. I need you for the shops. No loafing around the Library with those books—no sneaking off with that dirty pedlar."

Petey spent the remainder of that day on the fire-escape five flights above the narrow, littered street. He stretched out on the rusty iron grating with his chin propped up on his thin arms and watched with compassion the intricate and tireless efforts of the goldfish to find a passage of escape from its limited sea. He changed the water in the glass twice and he stole a biscuit from Emma's kitchen to feed the small, golden creature. Several times he whispered a question: "What's it like at the bottom of the sea?" Or a soft word of hope: "Tomorrow."

At bedtime he crawled reluctantly through the window to go to his dark and sour-smelling bedroom. His father and mother were in the kitchen. Emma was reading a day-old newspaper she had picked out of an ash-can. Steve was staring morosely at his big hands. Petey paused at the doorway.

"The man said I wasn't to let no harm come to the goldfish," he said tentatively.

Steve started to say something, but after a nervous glance at Emma he checked himself and picked at his finger instead. Emma turned to the advice column in her paper and said nothing.

Encouraged that a reference to the goldfish incident had brought him no reprimand, and wanting very much to talk to someone, Petey went on a little more confidently.

"He was a real old man," he declared. "He had long white hair and long whiskers, like Mr. Goldfinger, only longer. He said he heard complaints about one of his fish being locked up in a beer glass. He said he would have come sooner but he has terrible rheumatism from sleeping in damp places and being so old."

Steve looked up from his hands and smiled at his son, enjoying the breathless tumble of the boy's words. Suddenly Emma dropped her newspaper into her lap and looked severely from one to the other.

"You're lying again," she announced.

"No, Ma; it's true. The man said did I want to go with him and he'd tell me all about the goldfish, and I said I had to ask my mother. He said all right, I should come back in the morning. He asked me what my name was, and I told him, and he said he'd remember it. And then he said his name—"

"*Shut up your lying!*" Emma cut him off sharply. "Get to bed!"

In the shade of the tenement doorway Emma considered where to search next for the missing boy. Her wrath, born of chagrin at being taken in by a child's fancy, impelled her to continue the search. It was an ideal wrath, unalloyed by anxiety. And Emma knew she would be miserable until she could consummate it in an act of retribution.

To Emma's left, as she peered about, lay the rubble of Lower Manhattan through which she had just travelled. Before her were the barren cobbles, shimmering in the terrible heat. To her right moved the East River, a placid, tidal estuary whose waters are the waters of the Yangtze, the Orinoco and the Ægean Sea. She turned her eyes towards the river.

The sky above it was stained with smoke from a power plant to the north. From the south, whence the river moved, there arose the scent of nutmeg and cinnamon from the grinding machines in the warehouses on the waterfront.

Farther to the south, beyond the reach of smoke and the scent of spice, higher than the paper kites the slum children fly from the tenement rooftops, floated a solitary gull, borne aloft by rising currents of air from the Atlantic Ocean.

Emma jammed her fists into the pockets of her soiled, flapping dress and strode towards the river. She didn't know where to begin to look, because the riverfront ran for a mile or more in either direction. She was trying to decide when the sound of a horse-drawn waggon behind her caused her to turn round. She recognized the waggon and the driver.

Hunched in the splotchy shade of the ragged canopy of his waggon, old Goldfinger dozed torpidly in the heat. His dejected horse had fallen into a slow, clopping gait, each lurch and falter marked by a clatter of seltzer siphons stacked in cases in his cart.

Goldfinger was a small man of melancholy appearance. He wore a yellowing white beard which hung in matted shreds down to a modest paunch, vestigial evidence of fairer times. The reins lay loosely in his grubby hands, and, undisturbed by dreams of rowdy boys pitching cobbles at his waggon, he snoozed open-mouthed like a feeding trout.

" Hey ! " Emma shouted. " Hey, seltzer ! "

Commerce intruding upon his sleep, Goldfinger popped his eyes open and hauled on the reins in a business-like way. The old horse stumbled to a halt and uttered a shuddering sigh.

" Seltzer ? " Goldfinger pronounced the word with hope, for business was very bad.

Emma stepped to the side of the waggon. " You seen my kid ? "

Goldfinger's failing eyes recognized at length the woman who

stood below him with her fists on her hips and her jaw shot forward in an unpleasant manner, and he regarded her with inward reproach. He saw that she was not a customer (ach !), but the wild woman he knew as the mother of the small golden-haired *goy* who had ridden with him one day on the waggon. He remembered how she had pulled the child roughly off the seat next to him and, right there in the street (God forbid !), had thrashed him for riding with him.

" Seltzer ? " repeated Goldfinger with calculated mildness.

" My boy ! " Emma shouted again. " He been with you ? You seen him around the river with some old man ? "

Goldfinger discovered that he had become involved in an ethical problem. He approached it with a pedlar's logic, compounded in part of synagogue and in part of street. While Emma stood irritably by, he searched his head for an answer to her question that would be ethical.

Had he seen the boy ? Yes. When ? Shortly after dawn while he was driving his old horse to the watering trough by the river. The boy was hurrying along the street, and in his hands he carried a beer glass, and in the glass there tossed a small fish. In spite of the chill of the early morning he was dressed only in faded corduroy trousers and a pair of plimsolls. He called to Goldfinger, and Goldfinger stopped the waggon.

He told Goldfinger he was bringing the fish to a friend who lived down by the river. The boy spoke of other things which the pedlar, with his scanty English, but half understood. Goldfinger could recall only fragments : the place where the fish live—rheumatism—damp places—and an odd name which escaped his uncertain memory altogether.

Then the boy had hurried on, and Goldfinger watched the small figure trot across the waterfront street to the edge of the sea wall and then along the sea wall in the direction of the municipal asphalt plant several blocks north.

Now ! Did a woman who whipped her boy in the street, who would probably whip him again when she found him, deserve to be helped ? No, decided Goldfinger.

The old pedlar who lived alone, without sons, sighed unhappily.

" Well, you gonna tell me or not ? " Emma demanded shrilly.

Goldfinger turned his face to her. He tilted one shoulder in his most obsequious manner, and pronounced a single word.

" Seltzer ? "

Emma stepped back in furious astonishment. " Damned old fool ! " she raved. " Damned foreign old fool ! " Then she rushed away towards the river.

Goldfinger sighed again. He reached into the back of his

waggon and drew forth a bottle of seltzer. From under the seat he produced a grimy glass. He splashed the glass full of charged water and, leaning back into the shade of the canopy, drank slowly while he watched Emma's retreating back. Ethical problems, he discovered, always gave him a sour stomach.

Unpredicted by the meteorologists who had forecast only hot days for a week to come, an ocean breeze began to move softly through the city. A few blocks away it entered the open window of the Public Library, where it rustled the newspapers and touched the books with the pictures of the gods and goddesses. It stirred into life the few sere leaves in the public park, and it brushed the surface of the wading pool.

It rippled the dark water of the East River and it sharpened the aroma of spice from the warehouses to the south. It urged Emma on to the river.

Emma's encounter with Goldfinger served to bolster her contention that the forces of life were lumped in a conspiracy against her. During the morning she had explored every spot where Petey might be found: the Library, the park, the wading pool, and now the waggon of the pedlar. Not only had she been unable to catch up with her son, but her queries about him were met with blank looks and infuriating shrugs.

With all the known haunts examined, there was nothing for her to do, she decided, but to continue to the river and (although she obstinately refused to accept him as a real person) to seek the old man Petey had babbled about. Emma snorted through her nose as she recalled the ridiculous tale.

The East River, gay now with sunlit ripples, was just ahead. Emma hurried along the last half-block and stepped to the edge of the sea wall.

Across the river from her lay a jumble of warehouses with travel-stained merchant ships tied up before them. Far up the river to the north hung the spidery bridges of Upper Manhattan. Down the river rose a miscellaneous skyline of buildings and stacks and more bridges. This way lay the passage to the sea.

But Emma was not concerned with the view. Her eyes reached only along the edges of the water, and she saw that the sea wall was deserted. Petey was not here.

Perhaps she had missed him somewhere; perhaps he had returned home while she was out looking for him. The possibility served to relieve Emma's frustration somewhat. She would return home and find Petey there. Yes.

She would punish him (but perhaps not as harshly as she had intended) and send him to bed. Then, relieved of the torment of

her wrath, she would drink a glass of cool beer and read yesterday's newspaper while she waited for Steve to come home from work. As she thought about these things, she strolled north along the sea wall towards the asphalt plant.

She would allow Petey to come out and eat with her and Steve. Then, if her husband and her son were properly penitent about this stupid business of the goldfish, they would all go to the movies, and afterwards Emma would sleep without dreams, the reward of a penance exacted.

Feeling more cheerful about life than she had in many months, Emma turned away from the river to go home to her tenement flat. As she did so, a sparkling object in the little border of dry grass along the sea wall caught her eye. Although it was some distance away, Emma recognized it as a beer glass. She walked along the sea wall to where it lay. It was empty.

It was then that she saw something else on the ground next to the beer glass; the sight stiffened her with shock.

Strewn about as though thrown there in careless haste, and almost the colour of the dry grass, were a pair of corduroy trousers and a pair of plimsolls. Emma recognized them immediately as Petey's.

She looked at them for a moment, and then she stepped to the edge of the sea wall and peered down into the deep water, which moved singing, sparkling to the sea.

Gaunt and lean, with the rising south wind whipping her soiled gingham dress against her hard thighs, she stood at the river's edge for a long time, trying to understand what had happened to Petey. As the haunting finality of understanding slowly came to her, the tautness of shock passed and left her face weak and ugly in its slackness.

Suddenly Emma felt an ancient prompting arise within her, and with it came a small strength. Almost without knowing why she did so, she turned away from the deep river and stepped to the clothing strewn on the border of dry grass.

With both hands she reached down and grasped at the faded trousers and the worn plimsolls.

She gently stroked away the bits of dry grass that clung to them. She placed the soles of the plimsolls together and carefully wrapped the trousers about them. The movements of her hands were lingering and meticulous, and she hesitated now and again to assure herself that no wrinkles of cloth marred the symmetry of her package.

The wrapping painstakingly completed, Emma smoothed the soft corduroy once more and then placed the small bundle in the cradle of her arm.

Moving carefully, as though fearful of disturbing her burden, she straightened up and began to walk slowly away from the river towards her home.

At that instant, carried joyously on the fresh south wind from the direction of the sea, there arose the prolonged and distant blast of a horn. It echoed faintly against the walls of the old tenements and then softly died away.

* * *

THE LADY SAID—YES

Of Various Proposals—and their acceptances by famous ladies of fiction. Who was the lady who expressed her willingness in each case ?
Count one for remembering her name, one for the title of the book and one for the author, making a total of twenty-four points. **Answers on Page 105.**

1. *" Send me word tomorrow,*
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite ;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
And follow thee my lord throughout the world."
2. *" You want ? "*
" Yes," she said almost fiercely. " Yes. Yes. Yes."
3. *" I can hardly speak the words ; but—but—you are not wholly indifferent to me."*
4. *" Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it ! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose."*
5. *" Say Yes, damn you, or—"*
She whispered " Yes " before she even thought. It was almost as if he had willed the word and she had spoken it without her own volition.
6. *"—well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked—here kiss my hand though.—So, hold your tongue, now, don't say a word."*
7. *" If ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer—if ever I wished a righteous wish—I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth."*
8. *She put her warm lips close to his cap.*
" I love you," she said. He could not hear her very well, but he turned for a second, and, comforted, smiled into her eyes.

INTERRUPTED HOLIDAY

If something was going to happen, it would have to happen soon

by LAURENCE KIRK

IT was a bleak evening in the Jane-Jennifer flat. Everything connected with the motor tour in France had been arranged for months: passports were in order; francs had been obtained; they even knew what they were going to eat at which hotel.

Then only a fortnight before the start, when Jane was driving round to fill up with petrol, she got herself squeezed between a trolley-bus and a lamp standard. Jane herself was undamaged; but Connie, the car, was going to be out of action for months, and so the holiday was smashed to smithereens.

Jennifer was a real friend and had said a dozen times that of course the trolley-bus driver was to blame. But that didn't help them to decide what they were going to do; and finally, having exhausted her supply of epithets for the trolley-bus driver, Jennifer disconsolately picked up the morning paper and read it for the second time.

It was a few minutes later that she suddenly looked up.

"Jane, listen to this!"

Jane listened and she went on.

"It's in the Personal Column, and it's headed MOTOR TOUR IN FRANCE."

"Go on," Jane said.

"MOTOR TOUR IN FRANCE," Jennifer repeated. "Quiet well-bred married couple have unexpected vacancies two ladies in vintage tourer starting July 17th for Rheims, Dijon, Nice, and return. Share expenses only. Phone Langton 4301."

Jane thought carefully for a moment. She was the pessimist in that flat, and Jennifer was the optimist.

"Funny that they call themselves well-bred," she said at last. "That's the sort of thing they might have left for other people to find out."

Jennifer was quite practical in spite of being an optimist. "They might certainly," she agreed. "On the other hand, if they had described themselves as a noisy ill-conditioned unmarried pair, I don't think they'd have had very many answers."

Jane smiled for the first time since the encounter with the trolley-bus.

"How right you are!" she answered. "All the same one has to be careful about people one doesn't know. Why, for instance, do they say two ladies and not another married couple?"

"Perhaps the well-bred gentleman is jealous of his wife."

"And perhaps he's very flirtatious! Besides, why do they describe the tourer as vintage?"

"It is a bit breezy," Jennifer admitted.

"And so it may be! If we go roaring down France in an open car in this heat, all the facials in the world will never restore our complexions."

"I don't think vintage necessarily means open."

"It might be a polite way of saying very old," Jane insisted.

"Even so," Jennifer retorted, "it's hardly likely to be older than our poor Connie."

There was a pause. Then at last Jennifer spoke up again.

"Jane dear, we've got to come to some decision about our holiday. And to do it pretty soon. So I think we ought to look at the things that are right for us instead of the things that may be wrong. They are starting almost exactly at the time we wanted to start, and they are going pretty well where we wanted to go.

"Of course, we'll have to find out how long they are staying and a lot of other things as well. So supposing we rang up Langton 4301 now and arranged to see them tomorrow evening after work? Then we could decide for ourselves whether they are well-bred and what vintage means."

Just before six the following evening Jane and Jennifer made their way to the address that they had been given in West Kensington. They examined the block of flats carefully because that might give some indication of the kind of people who lived inside. But the block did not tell them much either way. The people in it might be well-bred and might merely like to think that they were.

What was more interesting was that there was a touring car parked just outside with a GB plate on its behind and half a dozen touring association badges on its front. It looked an experienced car, even a vintage one; but the tyres were almost new, and, above all, the top and the windows seemed to fit properly. Jane would have liked to examine the cushions inside, but when she furtively tried the handle of the door it was locked.

This brief inspection was sufficient to pass the car, and they then went in to the block of flats to see how the couple responded to the cursory test of meeting. The door was on the second floor,

and after ringing the bell, Jane and Jennifer exchanged a nervous, almost apprehensive, glance.

A few seconds later the door was opened by a very pretty young woman. Jane explained that they were the people who had rung up about the advertisement, and the young woman answered that she was Mrs. Welcome and that her husband was waiting for them in the sitting-room.

Both girls looked at the furniture critically as they walked in. Bric-a-brackish rather than well-bred, they decided. On the other hand, the husband, John Welcome, was a good deal better than they expected. He was very tall, and if his moustache was a little aggressive and his voice a shade too deep and manly, he certainly looked like a person who knew his way around and would not be pushed about by anyone.

Jennifer was shy with people she didn't know and her shyness took the form of talking uninterruptedly. She had therefore told the Welcomes the whole sad story of Connie's disaster before they could get a word in edgeways or even ask their guests to sit down.

John Welcome was suitably sympathetic, and when he had at last got them all to sit down, he went on, "Rotten hard luck! Really is! Might happen to anyone, of course. But it does look as though our trip might be just what you want."

"That's what we thought," Jane agreed. "But, of course, it depends when you are coming back."

"How long have you got?"

"Just a month: till August the 15th."

"Well, we were aiming to be back by the 10th or 12th. That ought to be all right. I can guarantee the car."

"Was that it standing outside?"

"Yes."

"It looked nice and solid."

"It is, and I'm a careful driver. I can guarantee that, too. By the way, you won't mind if I'm the only driver?"

Jane smiled wanly. She was hardly surprised to learn that he wasn't prepared to trust her with his precious car.

"Not at all. Jennifer and I want to see the country and we'll see much more if neither of us has to drive."

Mrs. Welcome had said nothing all this time, leaving all the conversation to her husband. Now she got up and fetched from a side table a tray with four glasses of sherry on it. They each took one and John Welcome raised his glass.

"Well, here's to a very enjoyable trip!" he said.

Jennifer looked shy and nervous again.

"There is the question of the expenses—" she insisted.

"Quite, quite. But I think they'll work out less than if you had

gone in your own car. Now running expenses, I put that at ten shillings a day each. It won't be more, and if it's less, then you pay less. All right ? "

" Yes. Most reasonable."

" Then there's only the hotels and lunches. I think it would be better if we each paid our own. We weren't intending to go to the very expensive places, you know. I hope you don't mind that ? "

" No, indeed. We weren't intending it either."

" Very well, then, I don't see that there's anything more to discuss. Oh, yes, there is one thing. As owner and driver of the car I am responsible for any losses. The simplest thing is for me to take out a comprehensive policy for all the baggage, etcetera. There's a good deal of pilfering these days and it will cost you five pounds each. But it's worth it."

" That will be all right."

John Welcome raised his glass again.

" Well, then, it's settled. Here's to a most enjoyable and interesting trip ! "

Jane, the pessimist, still wanted to know one thing more which had not been mentioned and that was why they had suddenly advertised for two lady passengers only about a fortnight before they were starting. It was an awkward question to ask, and she was relieved when she got the information without asking it. It appeared that a Major and Mrs. Chalmers had been going to do the trip with them and that the Major had suddenly been posted to Singapore.

This, of course, did not entirely explain why they advertised for two ladies and not another major and his wife ; but Jane just supposed that majors were not easily procurable at short notice, and left it at that.

Everything was settled down to the last detail when they came away. Jane and Jennifer had another quick look at the car and then walked up the street to the Underground Station.

" Well," asked Jane. " What did you think of them ? "

" Him or her ? " Jennifer replied.

" Him first."

" Not really my type, but quite a heart-throb in his way. And I should think he is a good driver."

" I think so, too. I think also that he might be flirtatious—if he dared."

" She's very pretty, isn't she ? "

" Yes," Jane ended. " And awfully dumb."

All their doubts, hesitations, and fears flew off one by one during the first three days of the journey, and Jane and Jennifer

had no idea then that they were all coming back to roost one by one during the next three.

It was quite evident even before they had got out of London that John Welcome was a careful and competent driver. That was one great anxiety removed. By the time they had got to Dover they were also satisfied that the car, whether vintage or not, was a very comfortable one and cruised along easily at twice the speed that poor old Connie could achieve. It cruised so rapidly that after a perfect crossing in brilliant sunshine they reached Beauvais in the late afternoon.

That first evening in Beauvais removed another small anxiety. They weren't expected to live in the Welcomes' pockets all the time. John Welcome explained that his wife liked to rest for an hour on arrival and he liked to look over the car. Therefore, if they wanted to take a walk or anything, he suggested that they meet for dinner —that is, if they wanted to go to the Châteaubriand. But possibly they knew of some better place of their own.

Jane and Jennifer thought it better that they should all dine together that evening as it was the first; but they were glad that they were considered free to do as they liked. John Welcome spoke French reasonably well and took great trouble to see that they had everything they wanted. At the same time, the flirtatiousness which they had suspected did not show up. He looked at them in exactly the same way whether his wife was present or not.

Another pleasing side of his character made its appearance that same evening. The conversation somehow got on to the route that Connie was to have taken and Jane explained all about the special detour to visit Bourges. John Welcome then looked at his wife and reminded her that neither of them had ever been to Bourges. Why shouldn't they change their plans and go through Bourges and on through the Cévennes for a change? They could then come back the ordinary way and make a round trip of it.

Mrs. Welcome, as usual, remained quite dumb at this suggestion. Neither her expression nor her eyes gave any indication whether she was pleased or displeased, and Jane and Jennifer protested that they must not alter their plans in any way on their account.

John Welcome, however, insisted, and the next day instead of going off to Rheims, they went on through Paris, did some sight-seeing there, and spent the second night, just as Connie was to have done, at Fontainebleau.

As it was a short run from there to Bourges, they spent the morning walking in the forest and did not start till after lunch. By this time the continued silence of Mrs. Welcome was getting on the girls' nerves.

They did everything they could to draw her out of herself, but

all they could get was a smile that meant nothing at all. They could not tell whether she was jealous of the attention her husband was paying them, whether she was unhappy, or bored, or thoroughly enjoying herself. She was just a basilisk with stones for eyes.

That evening Jane and Jennifer explored Bourges while Mrs. Welcome was resting. They spent a quarter of an hour in the lovely cathedral and then sat under a lime tree on the terrace beside it.

"What heavenly places we're seeing," Jane said contentedly.

"Lovely places," Jennifer agreed. "Everything's quite lovely —except . . ."

Jane looked at her sharply.

"Except her?" she asked.

"No, him, I think."

"But, Jennifer, he's charming. He couldn't have been nicer to us."

"Outwardly, no. But I think it's all façade. And I think he beats her on the quiet."

Jane always respected Jennifer's opinions however unexpected they might be.

"You think that's why she's so dumb?" she asked.

"Yes. Scared out of her life."

"But scared of what?"

"I don't know. The next beating probably."

Jane thought for a moment.

"Well, you may be right," he said. "But it wasn't the picture I had in mind."

"What picture did you have, Jane?"

"I'm not quite sure . . . But if you had to cast Mrs. Welcome for some Shakespearian part, which part would it be?"

"Jane darling, you know I'm not very good at Shakespeare."

"Well, it wouldn't be Ophelia, would it?"

"No."

"Or Desdemona?"

"No."

"What do you say to Lady Macbeth?"

"Darling, she's much too young and pretty."

"I know. But Lady Macbeth was young and pretty once, no doubt—and still was Lady Macbeth."

Jennifer shuddered and stood up.

"Thank heaven, we're dining by ourselves tonight," she ended.

The next day Mrs. Welcome was more uncommunicative than ever and even John Welcome lapsed into a morose silence. But there was a reasonable explanation for that. There had been a

series of minor mishaps that delayed them. First a late start owing to a mistake in the bill, and then they had filled up with dirty petrol which even the vintage tourer couldn't digest.

The result of all this was that they couldn't get on to Le Puy, as intended, and they had to stop at Clermont-Ferrand, a grim industrial town.

They got the last two rooms in the hotel there, which were side by side. Jane and Jennifer had shared a room at each stop both for company and economy, but it had hitherto always been well separated from the Welcomes. This time there was no option —not that it mattered having the Welcomes next door.

What did make Jane a little uneasy was that she was left to dine alone with John Welcome that night. It had been a very hot oppressive day, and Jennifer and Mrs. Welcome both had headaches when they arrived. They both took aspirins and went straight to lie down.

It was a bad dinner, for once, served by a sulky waitress on a soiled tablecloth. The tablecloth was so dirty that Jane fully expected John Welcome to become masculine and demand its instant removal, but apparently he wasn't going to bother for her alone. This was discouraging after a tiresome and trying day, but the last thing Jane wanted was for John Welcome to start showing off his feathers in front of her. His wife was difficult enough without that.

By the time the meal had dragged to an end, she had decided that the reason he didn't show off his feathers was that he had no feathers of much interest to show. There was that fine manly exterior, an adequate supply of polite clichés, and behind that, nothing.

Jennifer was already asleep when Jane said goodnight to John Welcome and went up to her room. It was still insufferably hot, but the windows were as wide open as they would go, and there was nothing more she could do about it. So she undressed slowly, took a cool bath, and lay down on her bed.

She must have dozed for a short time; for when she next looked at her watch, it was nearly an hour later, and the water still seemed to be running out in the bathroom. When it still went on, she decided that she must have left the tap running, and got up to investigate. It was not till then that she realised that the steady dripping noise had nothing to do with the bathroom, but was the sound of a voice next door in the Welcome's room. Jane then went and quite unashamedly listened at the open window. She could not hope to hear what was being said, but she could at least discover whether it was the sound of a man beating his wife or a woman nagging her husband.

There was not the slightest doubt which it was, after she had listened for a few moments. It was Mrs. Welcome's voice that went on ceaselessly, uninterruptedly, like water dripping on stone. It was a maddening sound, enough to justify any man beating his wife; but although Jane lingered on hopefully by the window, there was no sound of any retaliation, not even a verbal protest, and the dripping noise went on and on and on.

Jane slowly went back to bed. How odd to talk so much, she thought, when you have a bad headache! The one time you don't want to talk—or want other people to talk—is when you have a headache!

And then quite suddenly she found herself wishing that she had not cast Mrs. Welcome for the part of Lady Macbeth. Because, if Mrs. Welcome really was Lady Macbeth, then the only actors available for the parts of Duncan and Banquo were herself and Jennifer.

From that it was only a step to asking herself the question: what did they know about the Welcomes? Absolutely nothing. They might be perfectly normal, respectable people, and they might equally well be crooks—or murderers.

It was a momentary relief to think that there seemed no possible motive for the removal of either herself or Jennifer. But then she suddenly remembered about the insurance.

What had John Welcome insured them against? Loss of baggage? Accident? Death? Jane was quite certain that you couldn't insure another person's life, but she wasn't so sure about the baggage. Surely he could provide only against a possible claim against himself? He couldn't actually collect if something happened to her and Jennifer?

With the heat and the darkness and the nagging voice next door, Jane's brain wasn't working at its best. She was obsessed with the idea of the insurance and was already wondering how much a premium of five pounds would cover. Four hundred pounds? Five hundred? It wasn't much, but the most terrible things had been done for less than that.

As her fears swelled Jane thought of another thing. Time made a difference to what a premium would cover. Five pounds for one week would insure nearly three times the amount that five pounds for three weeks would. Supposing that John Welcome had only taken the insurance out for one week. That meant not only that more money was involved: but less time. If something was going to happen it would have to happen quite soon. Tomorrow perhaps . . .

At that moment a cheerful voice saying goodnight down below in the darkness brought Jane sharply back to a world of sanity.

How silly I'm being! she thought. I don't know about the insurance. I don't know about the Welcomes. And now she's stopped nagging, anyway.

She had almost succeeded in dismissing her fears as ludicrous when in the darkness she saw a little gleam on Jennifer's neck as she lay asleep. Aunt Evelyn's pearls! she thought. They're worth five hundred pounds.

And so the whole thing began again.

There was a sharp thunder-shower between six and seven the next morning. It cleared the heaviness of the air and helped to restore Jane to her normal frame of mind. She recognized then that the terrors of the night might just have sprung from a feeling, a hunch, and she knew that her hunches could be wrong sometimes as well as right.

She decided then not to say anything to Jennifer at present. If anything suspicious happened during the day she would tell her in the evening. In the meantime it was safer to have only one frightened woman in the party.

Jane was glad that she had made this decision, for everything was reassuring when they came down to breakfast. John Welcome was at his most charming, and even Mrs. Welcome took some slight interest in Jennifer's recovery from her headache.

John Welcome studied his maps carefully as they finished their coffee. He announced that they would be going through fine mountainous country, so they had better not count on going very far. He also announced that there did not seem to be any suitable inns on the way, and it might be better if they took sandwiches and had a picnic lunch. Jennifer agreed with alacrity before Jane herself could say anything either one way or the other.

They were on their way before eleven, and for an hour at least nothing happened to stir Jane's suspicions. But then she noticed that, for a man who had never been to the Cévennes before, John Welcome showed a remarkable knowledge of the roads. They were secondary roads, not very well sign-marked, but he never hesitated at a corner.

Again, an hour later, when it was time for the picnic lunch, John Welcome ignored all their suggestions as they passed one suitable place after another, and said there was a much better spot ahead. How could he know, unless he had been there before? Jane was on the point of asking him, but decided quickly that it would be fatal to show that her suspicions had been aroused.

When they got there twenty minutes later the place was ideal for a picnic—and for an accident as well. It was only fifty yards off the road down a shady path that ended on a flat ledge of rock,

with a waterfall in front of them and a sheer drop to the river three hundred feet below. Jane knew at once that they were in the gravest danger, and that John Welcome had been there before and had selected the place for a definite purpose.

At first she was still glad that she had not said anything to Jennifer. It might be some help if one of them at least could behave normally. But then, when they had unpacked their sandwiches and got out the bottle of wine, Jennifer went and perched herself on the extreme edge of the rock, with her legs dangling over the drop. Jane panicked then and implored her to be careful. All Jennifer said in reply was that she had a very good head for heights, and she cheerfully cracked a hard-boiled egg on the rock beside her.

Jane made no further protest. She arranged herself so that she could intervene if either of the Welcomes made a move towards Jennifer. In the meantime she looked carefully up and down the river to see if there was any fisherman casting a line. There was not a sign of one. Nor was there a single blue-bloused peasant in the field down below on the other side. They were quite alone on that ledge of rock.

She tried then to think again that she was mistaken about it all, but that solution simply would not work. During the last night's terror she had wondered how the Welcomes could arrange a car accident without getting hurt themselves. That puzzle was now solved. There wasn't any need for a car accident. Mrs. Welcome was stronger than Jennifer, and John Welcome was a great deal stronger than she herself. Nothing could stop them pushing them over the edge if they wanted to.

The only thing that would stop them was if they had thought of a still better, safer way. For instance, they might persuade them to take a walk down the narrow path to the waterfall and then start a land-slide of rocks above them. That might be easier to explain afterwards.

But the other simpler way was probably good enough. Many people had slipped off precipitous places; and nobody had ever been able to prove whether they had been pushed or not.

Jane was eating as slowly as she could to gain time. She wondered when John Welcome had been there before; and who was with him; and what had happened. She and Jennifer were not necessarily the first people who had accompanied the Welcomes on a tour in France.

Suddenly she noticed that both John and Mrs. Welcome were staring fixedly at Jennifer as she dropped the stone of the peach she had been eating over the edge. She was just going to call out; but then Jennifer herself looked up and saw the two pairs of staring

eyes. She jumped up immediately and came away from the edge, and Jane knew that she had realized her danger.

"Feeling giddy?" Mrs. Welcome asked in a hard, unpleasant tone.

"No," Jennifer answered quite calmly. "It's just that I was getting cramped. That's a very hard rock to sit on."

"Why not take a walk down to the waterfall?" John Welcome suggested. "We'll pack up and follow you."

Jane looked at the overhanging rocks where a landslide could so easily start.

"That's a good idea," she said. "Come on, Jennifer! Stretch our legs a bit while we can."

John and Mrs. Welcome watched them stonily as they started. Then Jane suddenly made a diversion into the undergrowth.

"Oh, what a lovely bird!" she called. "I must see it closer."

Neither of them saw the look Mrs. Welcome gave her husband as they ran off into the woods; but it was a look worth seeing.

They did not stop until they had gone three or four hundred yards after the imaginary bird. Then Jennifer turned panting to Jane.

"They're going to kill us," she said.

"I know," Jane answered. "I've known since last night. While you were asleep they were whispering for hours in their room."

"But what are we going to do? Go on running? There's nobody to help."

"And nothing definite to tell if there were anybody here."

"Then what?"

"I think we must go back to the car."

"Jane!"

"It'll be all right so long as we haven't made them suspicious. They'll need time to think out another plan."

When they got back to the car, John and Mrs. Welcome were already there and the girls apologized for keeping them waiting.

Just as they were starting Jane leaned forward and said it was the loveliest picnic they had ever had: they must have another. John Welcome replied that he would look at his maps and arrange something for the next day.

After that, they went on south. He drove rather faster than usual.

There was plenty of time for them to reach some large civilized town for the night, but that never happened. John Welcome, who had found his way so easily in the earlier part of the day, now began to lose it for no reason at all.

In the end, they stopped at a country inn with a loudspeaker blaring out a radio programme on the verandah. John Welcome apologized for taking them to such a place; but hotels were few in that region, and he did not want to be overtaken by darkness on the twisting, narrow roads. In that at least Jane and Jennifer were in agreement with him, and for a moment they were reassured.

They had not been at the hotel long before they discovered that the situation was not as they wished it to be. They were never left alone for a moment. Either John or Mrs. Welcome was beside them, listening to what they said to each other or anyone else, watching everything they did. Even when they went up to their room, there was Mrs. Welcome on the verandah across the courtyard pretending not to watch their window; and when they left their room, John Welcome would happen to be coming up or down the stairs.

They knew then that the time was even shorter than they feared.

At last, at ten o'clock, they were in their room with the door locked. For a brief moment they felt reasonably safe. No one was going to force the door, and it wasn't likely that anyone would climb the balcony outside the room. And this time, thank heaven, the Welcomes were not next door but across the courtyard, in a room with a balcony exactly opposite.

They had no plan as yet. But they didn't undress, and after a quarter of an hour they turned the light out and sat behind the window watching the balcony opposite.

They had been there perhaps another ten minutes when a light went on there. A moment or two later John Welcome came out on the balcony, looked across towards their room, and went in again. They couldn't hear anything that was said, and they couldn't see Mrs. Welcome inside; but they knew that he must have told her that their light was out.

This time there was no sound of water dripping on stone. The scene came to them in visual form. The light was still on across the courtyard and the French window half open, and they saw John Welcome's figure passing it and repassing it as he strode about the room.

They never saw his lips move, but there was distress and discomfort in his walk, and there was little doubt that someone else in that room was talking. On and on it went: ten minutes, half an hour, three-quarters, and John Welcome went on passing and repassing the window. Then at last he sat down and buried his head in his hands. Jane could almost hear the other voice as he sat there.

"*Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers!*"

Neither of them had had any opportunity to make inquiries downstairs about buses or the hiring of a car or anything else. Jane now got up abruptly. She told Jennifer to go on watching the window and warn her if there was any need, and she then took her torch and went out. Everything was in darkness and there was no one about. But she groped her way down to the vestibule and at last discovered a noticeboard, which gave information about buses. There was one leaving for Le Puy at a quarter past six in the morning.

They did their packing then and there, and spent the rest of the night awake, by the window.

In the morning, when Jane and Jennifer came creeping down the stairs with their suitcases in their hands, the patron immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were trying to get away without paying.

The production of a suitable supply of bank notes reassured him, but he was still doubtful and obstructive. What were Monsieur and Madame Welcome going to say ? Why travel to Le Puy in a slow, hot, crowded, dirty bus when the magnificent auto of Monsieur Welcome would get them there in half the time ?

Jane answered all these questions as best she could. As for Monsieur and Madame, she handed him a note to give them. The note had been written and rewritten several times during the night. It said briefly that they had received news which necessitated their immediate return to England.

It was, of course, quite impossible that they could have received any such news at that place ; but it was the best that either of them could think of and looked fairly well on paper. As they couldn't cash any traveller's cheques there, all Jane could do was to promise to settle up for the travelling expenses when they got back to England and to regret the inconvenience they had caused.

The encounter with the patron took ten anxious minutes while Jennifer furtively watched the window across the courtyard. They then had to drag their suitcases four hundred yards to the mairie, where the bus stopped. It was a good twenty minutes late, during which time they were in an agony of fear, expecting to see John Welcome striding down from the hotel at any moment.

What was worse, the bus was crammed with workmen when it did arrive, and there wasn't even any standing room left. Jane and Jennifer were at the end of their tether by this time. All they could do was to look tearful and say that they *must* travel on that bus to Le Puy.

At that, an argument began. Half the workmen gallantly said that certainly the young ladies should travel on the bus, while the

other half—and the driver—answered that they certainly would not. While the gesticulation was at its height, a car drew up with a middle-aged, bowler-hatted driver who inquired what all the fuss was about. He was told at great length and looked quite sympathetic.

"What a pity," he said, "that it was to Le Puy that the young ladies had a need to go! Now, if only it had been to Marseilles it would have been the greatest pleasure to him, Hercule Pinard, to have conveyed them."

Before he knew what was happening Jane and Jennifer had bundled their suitcases and themselves into the car, and the surprised, bowler-hatted Monsieur Hercule Pinard found no alternative but to drive on. He was a respectable, nervous little man; and it was not long before the fear and confusion in the two girls' minds communicated itself to him.

His feelings were excusable. It was very strange that the young ladies should get into such a state about going to Le Puy and then suddenly insist on accompanying him in quite a different direction. It was equally strange that such young and well-dressed ladies should find themselves stranded in that remote part of France at that hour of the morning, with no means of conveyance.

And it was stranger still how one or other of them was always looking round through the back window as though they expected to see another car pursuing them.

Monsieur Hercule Pinard soon decided that the fewer questions he asked the less uncomfortable he would be. He was much relieved when they changed their minds once more and decided that they would like to get out at Nîmes.

He left them there at the railway station and drove on to Marseilles, looking very pink in the face. He was hoping that his wife would never get to hear of this escapade.

Four days later, Jane and Jennifer were sunbathing on the warm, yellow, curving beach at Sainte Maxime. That was as near to Nice and the other larger resorts that they dared to go. They had not reported their strange adventure to the police nor to anyone else; and now, with the passage of only four days, it was unlikely that they ever would.

The whole episode seemed utterly incredible even to themselves. The one redeeming feature of it was that they had both felt the absolute certainty of their danger at the time, and therefore there was no need to make excuses to each other. But that absolute certainty had begun to evaporate even while they were still driving with Hercule Pinard. If the Welcomes' car had come chasing after them down the road, the certainty would have returned immediately; but fear, like love, needs continual refuelling, and

with no tourer chasing them and no silent Lady Macbeth beside them, they began to have doubts.

Now, after only four days, they no longer looked for John Welcome lurking behind a newspaper in the hotel or for Mrs. Welcome concealing herself amongst all the indistinguishable pairs of dark glasses on the beach. They were convinced already that it was their own imagination that had been playing tricks on them.

As she lay cooking herself to the right shade of tan that morning, it consoled Jane to think that she and Jennifer were not the first people to make fools of themselves in such a way. The only thing to do was to admit it : to laugh at themselves.

Perhaps the day would even come when they would take sherry with the Welcomes in the flat at West Kensington and explain how all the misunderstandings arose.

But that day never came.

The story ended as it had begun, with Jennifer reading a paragraph in a newspaper. This time it was not a London daily but a local French paper. Jennifer had picked it up after her sun-bath, and reading lazily for a few minutes, she suddenly made a husky, strangled sound and pointed to a paragraph in the middle of the front page.

Jane leaned across and looked at it. She felt Jennifer's hand creep into hers, the fingers intertwining, as she began to read :

FATALITY ON GRANDE CORNICHE

Yet another fatal accident has occurred on the Grande Corniche. On the evening of the 25th a car with a British registration number failed to take the corner at Le Souf and somersaulted two hundred metres down the precipice. The victims are a Monsieur and Madame John Welcome of London.

Curiously enough, although the names and numbers are different, a similar car was involved in an incident at a picnic in this same district two years ago. On that occasion, a Monsieur Ballard and a Madame Weston were killed by a fall of rocks while taking a walk to see the famous Caprice waterfall. It is suspected that Madame Ballard and Monsieur Weston, who were the survivors of that incident, are now the victims of the present fatality.

The police are making further inquiries.

* * *

Some people can stay longer in an hour than others can in a week.

W. D. HOWELLS

NIGHT MUSIC

The moonrise wakes the nightingale . . .

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Night came down on Turkey, a moonless night but bright with stars. Stamboul in the darkness draped itself in magnificence and came out, as it does every night, in lordly shadowy outline against the sky. The clamour of dogs, the thud of the watchman's iron-shod staff began to be heard in the silence. And then it was the appointed hour for the muezzins, and from every part of the phantasmal city rose the usual symphony of minor chants, high-pitched, light, and pure, winged like prayer itself.

The first night this of summer, a night of real glow and enchantment.

PIERRE LOTI, *Disenchanted*,
translated by CLARA BELL

Serenade

The oyster of the night has bred
a pearl that hangs above the hills.
a waterfall of liquid light
its silver through the black leaves spills.

The pebbles of the full moon skim
ripples of shadow to your bed.
The streets are full of ghosts—come out!
and drive their rumours from my head.

Come out and breathe the scented night,
flavoured with lemon and with rose,
when on your breast this pearl must flame
as moonbeams kindle when it snows!

ROB LYLE

Wakeful Nightingale

A night is announced that is loud with nightingales, but not "the white nightingale hidden in the branches and heavy leafage of the clouds," for that was a nightingale of another order altogether,

the nightingale of the eclectic comedies, of my first master when I was sixteen, the Futurist of Milan; but instead it is a spring evening and we are walking in the poplar wood far down in the valley, listening to the young birds who are practising their notes, trying them again and again to get them perfect, so that the poplar wood is like a school for opera, like an academy or conservatoire of singing, and we look up through the vines, blue-painted against the phylloxera, towards the distant castle standing on its hill among the cypresses, and slowly make our way back to it in the hot evening, up the steep cobbled slope to the fountain where the laundry is spread out to dry under the fig trees, to the stone statues of lions, or rather, wolves and lionesses that guard the terraces, up the steps of green tufa, treading over the ant-columns, and into the high and empty rooms.

How noisy the night when you throw back the wooden shutters and look down upon the fireflies, and after a while hear the piercing sweetness of the nightingales! The frogs are croaking wherever there is water, and now the owl starts from the cypress tree.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL,
Cupid and the Jacaranda

Fêtes Galantes

They came by water to these dark green bowers.
Here, islanded in flowers, their secret loves
Fled or unfolded; cosseted like doves,
Lady to cote would fly in the night hours.

Ruffled the plumage, yet the fee was light
To pay the boatman for such gaiety,
Or the guitarist for his song and flight
Into the darkness where no eye could see.

Gold the thin bracelet on the balustrade
Under the purple canopy; the fret
Only of branches parting, pushing aside,
The lover satisfied or following yet.

Step after step, by statues without stain,
See the gay puppets go to their soft caves.
The torchlight reddens the water. What will rain
In that cold winter when there are no leaves?

JOHN BAYLISS,
Fête at Rambouillet by Fragonard

Hawaian Night

Warm perfumes like a breath from vine and tree
Drift down the darkness. Plangent, hidden from eyes,
Somewhere an eukaleli thrills and cries
And stabs with pain the night's brown savagery
And dark scents whisper; and dim waves creep to me,
Gleam like a woman's hair, stretch out, and rise;
And new stars burn into the ancient skies,
Over the murmurous soft Hawaian sea . . .

RUPERT BROOKE, *Waikiki*

Water Music

On Wednesday evening at about eight the King took water at Whitehall in an open barge . . . and went up the river towards Chelsea. Many other barges with persons of quality attended, and so great a number of boats, that the whole river in a manner was covered. A City Company's barge was employed for the music, wherein were fifty instruments of all sorts, who played all the way from Lambeth, while the barges drove with the tide without rowing as far as Chelsea, the finest symphonies, composed express for this occasion by Mr. Handel, which His Majesty liked so well that he caused it to be played over three times in going and returning.

At eleven His Majesty went ashore at Chelsea, where a supper was prepared, and then there was another very fine consort of music, which lasted till two, after which His Majesty came again into his barge and returned the same way, the music continuing to play until he landed.

From The Daily Courant, July 19th, 1717

Sweet Dew

Now the night has closed me round
With sleep and scent beneath the trees
That guard the seven-circled seas
That hem my island steeped with sound;
Now the blossomed flowery ground
Is mute and all the earth is still;
I hear the laden foliage spill
Sweet dew of morning: soon the glow
Of light will fold me dreaming so;
And soon the light will hold my will.

JOHN EVELYN, *Poems and Songs*

CASUAL ENCOUNTER

Tomorrow there would be someone else

by ALBERTO MORAVIA

SHE stopped in front of a shop to see if the car was following her or had merely slowed down for some other reason. It was a small mud-covered army vehicle with an officer alone at the wheel. When the car was alongside the shop front, it slowed down until it nearly stopped.

She asked herself whether she would agree to get in if invited, and decided she wouldn't. Certainly not in that street of little hat-shops and dress-shops where she was well known. She turned her back on the car and started looking at a silk scarf in the window, one she had found out the price of several days ago because she hankered for it. She heard the car creeping along behind her against the kerb, and then she heard it move off, and, completely absorbed in staring at the coveted object, she gave her shoulders a slight shrug as if to say good-bye.

But after she had derived a sort of detached and fascinated pleasure from looking at the silk scarf, so desirable yet, in view of her shortage of money, so unattainable, her thoughts switched back to the car that she had so disdainfully allowed to move off. And yet it was with the scarf in mind that she had encouraged the officer with two or three distinct and meaningful smiles. Besides, she had more or less left home that day with the express intention of looking for someone who would enable her to buy the scarf.

These contradictions between her intentions and her character exasperated her. Why, for once, was she not capable of being really consistent ? If from now on she was adopting this profession, why not make up her mind to shake off her qualms and fits of dignity for good and all ?

Regretfully she stopped looking at the scarf and glanced at herself for a second in the mirror of a side window in which brocade materials were exhibited. The wind had dishevelled her hair and long fair wisps were falling over her forehead and into her wide-open laughing eyes. The biting cold of the fine winter day had stiffened her face, and it was white and bloodless beneath the colours of her make-up. Her mouth was redder and fuller by

contrast. Her head was bare, and she had on a brown coat with upturned collar and a belt tight round the waist.

Anyway, she thought, she certainly didn't look like those horrible girls you saw in the streets arm-in-arm with soldiers. She felt an unexpected desire—it seemed to her final and unbreakable—not to allow herself to be led into temptation by chance encounters. This decision restored her normal carefree and frivolous peace of mind. Thus calmed, she lingered in front of the mirror to look at herself and tidy her hair.

The street was on an incline and sloped up to an esplanade overlooking the city. In the centre of the esplanade there was an obelisk. She drew away from the mirror and, looking along the street, saw that the car had stopped underneath the obelisk so that the officer could watch what she was doing and, if she didn't come towards the esplanade, could turn round and continue to follow her.

"He's waiting for me; he'll buy me the scarf," she thought happily, lightly, as if all the time she'd been looking in the mirror her mind had been tortured with regret at having let her opportunity slip.

Without thinking, she went to the door of the shop, opened it, called the manageress whom she knew, and asked her to put aside the scarf till the following morning. Then she set out briskly in the direction of the obelisk.

But while walking she suddenly remembered the decision she had taken a few moments earlier and bit her lip and shook her head angrily. So that was what her decisions were worth. She felt strong irritation with herself, yet she didn't think of turning back.

As justification she assured herself that it wouldn't have been any good; he would have caught up with her in any case. But she decided she would pass him without looking at him, and, should he accost her, she would answer in a way that left no doubts as to her respectability.

When she reached the esplanade she walked in front of the car with lowered eyes and went straight to the parapet from which you could enjoy a view of the whole city. She was well aware that to linger here and contemplate such a well-known panorama amounted to inviting the officer to get out of his car and join her.

But she thought that, taking it all in all, there was no harm in that. There was a big gulf and there were infinitely subtle distinctions between letting oneself be accosted, even answering—and the other business. She rested her elbows on the parapet and fingered her hair as she gazed down.

As she had foreseen, the officer came up and leant over the parapet beside her. She watched him out of the corner of her eye. He must be very young, younger than her. He had a round, ruddy

face with rather coarse features and two small deep-set eyes of soft blue.

He put his hand on the balustrade and stared at length at all the rooftops below with a kind of wonderment, as if he hadn't expected to see them. She looked at him insistently, shamelessly, thinking that he might turn round and the meeting of their eyes might lead to a speaking acquaintance. But the officer seemed unable to make up his mind to turn his head.

As the minutes passed, she became more and more angry with herself for making it so plain that she wanted to be accosted. The first stages of such encounters always got on her nerves, and the man's voice with its pretext for starting a conversation always made her jump angrily. But this time she felt that if she didn't take the first step nothing would ever happen.

Furiously, opening her eyes wide at the impassive, silent face, she said abruptly: "Lovely day, isn't it?"

The officer turned immediately and answered with deep conviction: "Yes, lovely."

He had a soft, agreeable voice. Silence fell once more. "I won't speak to him again," she thought, pulling a face that showed her irritation. "I'll stay a minute longer and then be off."

The officer was obviously struggling against his own shyness. At last, with an air of taking the bargaining usual in such cases for granted, he pointed to the car and said:

"Shall we get into the car?"

At this invitation, the woman felt as if her legs might move of their own accord in the direction of the car, and her rage increased.

"Why?" she asked, fixing him with an unpleasant smile.

"So as to be together," the officer answered frankly.

"But why should we be together?"

She now felt she ought to behave just like a lady who has been stopped in the street by a stranger with dubious intentions and is determined to show him his mistake. The young man looked disconcerted.

"So as to talk," he answered, and added tactfully: "We could go to a café."

"But I never go to cafés."

"Why not?"

"Merely because," she began, dwelling on the syllables and smiling with superior respectability, "I'm not in the habit of going to cafés."

"Oh," said the officer, as though the words had revealed all kinds of things. "Let's go for a drive then," he proposed, pointing again to the car.

" But I'm not in the habit of going driving with people I don't know."

She saw that he was blushing to the roots of his hair.

" My name's Bruce," he said, " Gilbert Bruce . . . and yours ? "

" I've got no name to you," she answered, preening herself on her cutting rejoinder.

There was a moment's silence.

" You think badly of me," the officer persevered, " but you don't know what I want of you."

She flared. " I know perfectly," she said. " You want to pay me for a couple of hours' fun, don't you ? "

She noticed that he blushed again without answering.

" And I also know," she pursued sourly, " how much you want to give me. Two or three thousand lire, perhaps even more. Aren't I right ? "

The officer tried to joke : " As you know the price so well . . . "

" Of course I know it ! And, by the way, your sort are usually quicker than you and mention the sum at once without so much beating about the bush."

" My sort are not so shy as I am."

" And then," she went on, " you would offer me a packet or two of cigarettes."

" Oh, cigarettes—of course," said the officer, attempting a smile.

" And perhaps some tins of food if I asked you ? "

She saw him shake his head kindly and go on smiling. Then he held out his hand and said with an effort :

" I see I've made a mistake. Please forgive me."

She saw that this was a farewell and suddenly felt almost terrified at being taken for the kind of woman she wasn't and then left in the lurch after so much trouble. Her pigheadedness and irritation vanished.

" No," she said, so hurriedly that it sounded really comic to her, " no, you haven't made a mistake."

" I haven't made a mistake ? "

" That's what I said." She was impatient.

She saw him blush a deep red, but this time it didn't seem to be with embarrassment.

" Then shall we go ? "

" Let's."

They went to the car. The officer helped her in, leapt in beside her, and started up.

" Where ? "

" To where I live," she said simply. " I'll show you the way."

The car circled the obelisk and moved off quickly towards the

public gardens under the low branches of the trees. It was a fine day, and all the avenues as far as the eye could see were crowded with strollers. As the woman passed them, she couldn't suppress a profound feeling of vanity to be overtaking all the pedestrians in a car, even a muddy army one.

She now wondered why she had treated the officer so badly as she had already decided to accept. She felt cross and at the same time vaguely pleased at doing yet again what she knew she shouldn't have done.

The officer, meekly following her instructions, drove the car through the gardens and then along a wide, tree-lined avenue. With the speed of the car and in the wind that filled her mouth and untidied her hair he felt the urgency of his desire that was now sure of being soon satisfied; and she felt both shame and a savage satisfaction.

They had entered a poor district where the overcrowded windows of squalid blocks of flats rushed by behind the bare branches of tall plane trees.

"This way," she said, pointing to a side road.

The officer turned skilfully on the tram-lines and entered the road. Those tenements on the avenue had been merely a façade concealing a vast stretch of miserable little villas.

"This way . . . right . . . left," the woman directed as the poor streets crossed and re-crossed. Intent, the officer altered the direction of the car at each new instruction. Finally she said: "Here we are," and the car stopped.

They were facing a gate covered with creepers. The garden looked crowded and narrow, hardly more than a passage round the little villa, which was dull brown and undecorated, with a stumpy little tower and a façade of four windows. It looked very small and very modest.

"If you like you can leave the car in the garden."

The officer nodded and started up again. She opened one side of the gate and then, with an effort, the other. "I wanted him to put his car in the garden," she was thinking, "because I'm really rather embarrassed at the thought of it being left outside."

On one side of the high porch in front of the door was a paved space just big enough to hold the car. But on the other, near the road, between the wall of the villa and the little surrounding wall, there was a patch of grass covered with old ivy and, at the bottom, a small enclosure with wire netting round it. Here the woman kept three hens and a cock.

To fill in the time while the officer was manœuvring his car into the restricted space, she went to look at the hen-run. The cock was yellowy-white, and his bright feathers and flaming red

comb and wattles stood out against the dark, dank background of decayed leaves and stunted shrubs, while the hens were black and hard to distinguish against the drab undergrowth.

" I couldn't have stayed standing beside the gate like a servant," she was thinking. " I might as well see to feeding the fowls now, and then he'll come and get a good impression, seeing me looking so domesticated."

She picked up a bowl of chicken-food and began scattering it, slowly, so as to give the officer time. She heard the car come in with a roar that suddenly stopped. She didn't turn round. The three hens pecked greedily, and she felt she presented a charming picture, well-dressed, with the bowl in her hands and the hens at her feet. She heard the creak of the gate as it closed, and went on scattering the food. The cock didn't seem hungry but stood aside, every now and again worrying his spur with his beak.

The officer entered the hen-run and came up to her. " I've shut the gate," he said, pleased with himself.

" That's right," she answered, without looking at him. The food had just come to an end. She bent down and put the bowl on the ground.

" Do you like hens ? " she asked as she straightened up.

" Well, to be quite honest, I don't," the young man answered with a smile.

" They lay eggs," she said portentously and with deep significance, as much as to say, " I am poor, and in these days hens that lay are valuable."

The cock had been standing apart ; but suddenly and as if casually, he approached a particularly puffed-up and dignified hen and leapt on her back. The hen squatted but made no attempt to escape. The cock gripped her comb ferociously with his beak and fluttered for a moment on top of her. Then he left her and began pecking busily at the last grains of food.

The hen got up, ruffled her feathers with a shake of the body, got them straight again, and then, more dignified and strutting than ever, began pecking the ground beside the cock. " They make love too," said the officer, with a sheepish smile.

The woman thought the remark in bad taste and said nothing.

" Shall we go ? " she proposed after a moment, in a detached, worldly voice.

They left the hen-run and made their way along the wall to the entrance.

The little muddy car stood in front of the porch.

" Have you come from the front ? " asked the woman, indicating the car.

" Yes."

" Are they fighting there ? " she asked, smiling at him as they mounted the steps. But she felt dissatisfied with her tone, she didn't know why.

" Yes, they're fighting," the officer answered, bored.

The woman took the key from her purse, unlocked the door, and went in. The officer followed and removed his beret from his head. They were facing a dingy, cold staircase with a primitive iron banister.

" I live on the first floor ; there are other people on the second," she announced as she went ahead. The officer said nothing.

At the first landing the woman opened the door and ushered him in. Then she shut the door, locked it, and left the key in the lock. She took the beret from the officer's hand and hung it up on the rack. The officer took off his cape and hung it up under the beret. The clothes-rack of shiny wood and metal was in a tiny passage with dark, dingy walls.

They went into the sitting-room, a small square room with walls the same dead colour as the passage. The furniture consisted of a divan and two armchairs placed round a glass-and-nickel table. In a corner a radio stood on a stool. She went to the window and pulled up the blind, but not much light came in.

The windows were long, with blue curtains, through which could be discerned the skeleton branches of a large tree. The officer looked round, hesitating to sit down on the hard, bleak divan with its cold blue cover.

" Sit down, sit down," she said, passing with cool familiarity from " you " to " thou ". The officer sat, and, as the woman moved within his reach, possibly encouraged by the change of pronoun, he leant forward and tried to catch one of her hands.

" No, no . . . wait a minute," she said and left the room.

She went to the bottom of the passage to a little house telephone and took off the receiver. Almost at once she heard the voice of her mother asking in her usual breathless way whether she was back.

" Obviously, since I'm ringing you up," she answered unkindly. " Don't let the child come down. I've got a visitor. I'll come up myself." Her mother began asking further questions, but she cut her short and put down the receiver.

She now began wondering whether she cared enough for the officer to keep up her initial line of conventional contempt for venal matters. " At least," she thought, " for this once I won't accept any money."

The first time she had let one of these soldiers in search of pick-ups come home with her, she had done so disinterestedly, without thinking of gain. And then at the moment of parting the

man had offered her money—which, with a pleasant, light, unthinking spontaneity that had astonished her, and an air of capitulation that the man must have thought calculated but was really the result of her surprise, she had accepted.

Afterwards she had repented, when she observed, or thought she observed, a faint hint of contempt in her first casual lover's attitude. And she had sworn to herself, while putting the money into her purse, that this would be the first and last time.

But for some unknown reason, things had turned out in exactly the same way with the second, the same capitulation, the same spontaneity, both gratifying and humiliating. And similarly with the third. And in the end she had given in entirely, though reluctantly, to this profitable avocation. But always with a miserable feeling of shame, vented on this occasion in the rude remarks with which she had greeted the officer's advances.

And now the question had come up again. Would she accept payment or not? True, she didn't like this officer any better than the others, but his youthfulness called for disinterested love—he was almost a boy, certainly five or six years younger than herself.

His youth was manifest, she thought, both in his shyness and his well-brought-up and respectful manners. He must be a student, she went on to reflect, and obviously a boy of good family, and it was doubtful whether he had ever had a woman before. Turning over these considerations in her mind, she went into a small clean kitchen. She opened a cupboard, took out a bottle and two glasses, put them on a tray, and went out again.

The afternoon was now drawing to a close. The flat was steeped in murky shadows that seemed to make the figure of the officer more unreal and improbable, sitting there on the low divan, with his legs stretched out and his hands in his pockets, between the two empty armchairs, and facing the empty table. She put the tray on the table, uncorked the bottle, and leaning over so that her hair fell over her nose, making her look a trifle exhausted and somehow more attractive, she filled the two glasses.

"It's English," she said with a smile, sitting down beside him. "Do you like it?"

"Yes, it's excellent," he answered with conviction. He drew a cigarette-case from his pocket and offered it to her.

"Cigarettes," she said with exaggerated vivacity. "Thanks . . . but I have some . . ." and she began looking for her bag.

The officer insisted with a gesture as if to say, "But do take one of mine," and she immediately gave up her search, and, with the same mortifying meekness that made her accept the money, she took a cigarette.

For a short while they smoked in silence. The woman had taken

off her coat and was shivering in the cold room, wearing only a tight, woollen sweater and a thin, narrow skirt.

"It's cold," she said with a smile, puffing into the air to show him the white cloud caused by her breath.

"Yes, very," he said equably.

"You English are more used to the cold than we Italians are. In your country it's always cold."

"It's colder than ever in London this year," the officer said, without looking at her.

"Why?" She saw him shrug his shoulders.

"The coal trucks are being used for army purposes and no one has much fuel."

"You wage war seriously . . . In England everybody does war work, even women, don't they?"

"Of course," said the officer with profound conviction. "Everyone is in the war . . . women too. You're perfectly right."

There followed a long silence. The officer looked fixedly at her with his little deep-set eyes of intense blue, and under his gaze she felt she was becoming nervous and wandering. "Now he'll try to kiss me," she thought, and felt something like terror—and, as though in rebellion, her mouth instinctively contracted into a little grimace of disgust. The imminence of the first kiss always aroused feelings of revulsion and indignation in her.

She had been married and had a daughter, she had had lovers, yet when two unknown lips came near to hers, they caused her skin to creep with a kind of hysterical and virginal repugnance.

However, the officer merely took her hand and seeing the wedding-ring asked: "Are you married?"

"Yes."

"And where's your husband?"

She hesitated. Must she tell the truth? That she was quite simply separated from her husband? With another officer she had taken it into her head for some unknown reason to say that her husband was a prisoner of war, and for a moment this lie had seemed a justification—for, if it made her behaviour worse from one point of view, from another it made her seem pathetic—she must shift for herself in her poverty and loneliness.

So, looking him brazenly in the eyes, she said, "He's a prisoner." The officer looked at her as before, without saying anything, but she thought she could detect in his eyes a glimmer of compassion, and she clung to it.

"I've been left alone," she said, weighing the syllables. "My husband was earning, but now I have nothing . . ."

It seemed to her that she was telling the truth, even though she knew perfectly well that it wasn't true, that her husband wasn't

a prisoner, that he sent her enough money for elementary necessities, and that the money she herself had made so far and was preparing to make again was used for buying luxuries. Yet it seemed to her she was telling the truth, and she felt upset, just as someone does when telling a truth that hurts.

" And you, are you married ? " she asked.

" Engaged."

She watched him put his hand into the back pocket of his trousers, draw out a wallet and from this a photograph, which he handed to her. It was of an average girl, neither pretty nor plain, leaning on a bicycle against a background of trees. She was conscious of putting a fatuous, conventional expression on her face as she looked at it, one that mixed respect and compunction. Then she handed it back. " Pretty," she said.

" Yes, she's very pretty," said the officer complacently, putting the photograph back in the wallet. She suddenly felt scared lest the sight of the photograph had cooled him off, and she felt she now wanted to entice the kiss that just before she had been so afraid of.

" We've hardly known one another for an hour," she said, smiling, " and yet it's as though we've known each other for ages, isn't it ? " As she said this she clumsily put her hand on his, twining his fingers in hers.

It was now twilight, and the shadows from the corners of the room had reached the divan and the couple seated there.

The officer squeezed the woman's hand and with his other drew her head towards him—not towards his lips but towards his shoulder. Thus they remained in the cold, dusky shadow for some time, her head on his shoulder.

She didn't quite know what to do, and she opened her eyes wide in the darkness. It wasn't the first time that she had come across this kind of sentimentality where she had expected forthright, uninhibited procedure, and on each occasion she had felt acute embarrassment and irritation.

At long last, after a delay that seemed to her endless, the officer made a move to kiss her.

" Wait," she said, with foresight, and with her handkerchief she removed the red from her lips. Then they kissed.

After the kiss, the officer once more drew her head onto his shoulder and began caressing her with his hand, stroking the hair on her forehead, ruffling it, smoothing it, and then ruffling it again. There was a kind of mute and sentimental frenzy about his caress, as if he wanted to wear her forehead away, like a wave that wears away a white pebble on the beach.

She realized that she had fallen in with a man more in need of affection than physical love, of tenderness than lust, and while

she let him continue she became cold and bored.

Every now and again the officer broke off his caress to give her a short kiss, and then began again, pressing his hand with open fingers on her forehead a little above her eyes, and then travelling up to the very roots of her hair. His hand was both light and heavy, light because inspired by a kind of fervour, heavy because he pressed hard as if to rub the caress into her skin, as though it were a kind of ointment. Unexpectedly, in the deep silence, there came a knock at the door.

" Sorry," she said, getting up. Through the shadow she went into the passage and unlocked the door an inch. At first she saw nothing, and then, on looking down, she saw the round face of her daughter, with her long hair tied on top with a ribbon.

" I told Granny not to send you down . . . I've visitors," she said, without opening the door any wider.

" Granny wants to know if you'll be in to supper."

" Yes, I'll be in. And now be off with you, and don't come back . . . I'll be coming up."

" All right." The child turned away obediently. Through the door she could hear her mounting the stairs one by one with little steps, for they were too steep for her legs. Then the noise died away, and she slowly shut the door.

She could feel his presence as she entered the room ; and without turning, with her hair still falling over her eyes, she said : " Shall we go into my room ? "

From the passage they went into the bedroom. Here, too, the cold dusk spread like an impalpable dust over the low bed and the few characterless pieces of furniture, giving an uninhabited and deserted feeling. The woman showed the officer in and closed the door.

When she turned she found herself in his arms. This time his embrace was so impetuous and clumsy that they both fell in a sitting position on the bed. She managed to stretch out her hand and turn on the light on the bedside table. They broke apart almost immediately and, not knowing what to say, she asked like a child : " What do you think of me ? "

She could see he was examining her attentively. For a moment she was afraid of some facile and wounding answer that would offend her, and she regretted her question.

" I think," he said finally, with deep sincerity and seeming humility, " that you are very beautiful." She looked down with a pleased expression. " Thanks. You're very kind."

Then she pulled herself together and rose to her feet. " I'm going to shut the window." She went to the window and lowered the blind. She was thinking : " Now I'll have to tell him to get

undressed," and she felt renewed irritation at his inexperience that obliged her to throw all delicacy to the winds.

Scarcely had this thought entered her head before she saw him calmly taking off his jacket and hanging it over a chair. Then he began unbuckling his trousers. This seemed at variance with the timidity of his first embrace.

She sat on the edge of the bed and began undoing her shoes, her teeth clenched in undefined anger. She heard the young man stretching out on the bed behind her, and suddenly the idea that he might be watching her became unbearable.

"Please," she snapped, turning on him violently, "turn over . . . I can't stand being watched while I'm undressing."

She noticed that he seemed astonished by her outburst, yet he turned his head round obediently on the pillow, while still lying on his back, with half his chest naked outside the cover. She got up and hurriedly, shivering, took off all her clothes.

But whether out of impatience or curiosity, the young man turned his head at the moment when she was in her most awkward and ungainly position—when with one knee on the edge of the bed and one foot on the ground, leaning forward with her breasts and hair hanging, she was climbing in beside him. Her irritation increased. But she leant over him and he shut his eyes in the warm shadow of her armpit, She put out the light on the bedside table.

Later they lay in each other's arms under the rough, embroidered material that tickled their naked limbs. She felt his hand in the darkness resume the long, insistent massage of her eyes and brow, sentimental as before, but with a new vibration that came from jealousy and possessiveness.

Every part of her body that was not touching his was cold, and yet, under the rain of his caresses, she felt her mouth take on an embittered, sceptical, ill-humoured line. She would have liked to stop thinking, but her mind pursued its stream of reflections independently of her will—not reflections, exactly, but absurd, disordered fantasies mingled with out-of-the-way memories and associations.

She imagined, for instance, the young man falling in love with her and carrying her off to his own country. This fantasy begot others about the life they would lead, the people they would meet, the house they would live in, and about her daughter and her mother. Thence she passed on to others hardly connected with those where she had started, and these, as if by spontaneous generation, sub-divided and diverged in strange, unforseeable directions.

At a certain point she was aware that she was wondering who on earth it was who had greeted her in the street that afternoon

shortly before she met the officer. These uncalled-for thoughts caused her a dull irritation, especially as, at the same time, as insistent and uncomfortable as the cold down her back, the question " Should I or should I not get him to pay me ? " nagged at her.

So they lay in the dark and silence of what was now night. At last she dozed off and after an indefinite time woke up again. She observed that the officer had got up and was already dressed and buttoning his tunic. The light was on and revealed a room in the sort of disorder that inevitably goes with encounters of this kind.

" I'll wait for you outside," he said, pointing towards the door. And went out.

After he had gone, she lay still in the crumpled bed, then suddenly felt afraid that the officer might escape without paying her. The fact that he had gone out in such a hurry was suspicious. She was disgusted at her fears and, while a prey to them, almost hoped that the officer really had made off ; in that case she would be a creditor, and not merely financially. She dressed quickly, unable to rid herself of her fear.

She combed her hair in the wardrobe mirror and observed that her eyes were dilated in a frenzy of greed, anger, and suspicion. As she gazed at the ignoble spectacle in the depths of the mirror, she caught sight of the folded notes lying on the bedside table.

She counted them with a frown of eager curiosity. There were far more than she had hoped for. She was then gripped by the fear that the officer might really have gone, and she ran from the room. She found him in the sitting-room, sitting on the divan. He had switched on the light, poured out a glass, and had his pipe between his teeth. When he saw her he got to his feet.

She went up to him and said : " I'm glad you gave yourself a drink . . . give me a little too, will you ? "

The officer took the bottle and filled her glass. She sat down and drank it greedily. She now dreaded the officer's departure as much as she had dreaded his first kiss. She experienced physical desolation, a feeling of separation that was insulting and harrowing.

She would have liked him to stay. They could go on drinking together ; they could get drunk. She wanted to drink because she thought that in their cups she would be able to tell the officer a whole lot of things that she knew some time or other she would have to tell someone.

She poured herself out a second glass and began to fill his. But she saw him refuse with a motion of the hand.

" Won't you have some more ? " she asked, frightened.

" No, thank you."

" I've got an idea," she exclaimed, her eyes bright with sudden hope, " why don't you stay and have supper with me ? I'll cook a

meal for you. I'll make spaghetti. Do you like spaghetti ? "

" Yes, I do indeed," he answered regretfully, " but I'm afraid I've got to go."

" No, don't. Stay for supper, and for the night, too."

" It's impossible."

" You can't stand the sight of me now . . . it's all over ? "

She was comforted to see his astonished shake of the head, as though she had accused him of a crime he hadn't committed.

He said simply : " I would like to stay. Anyone in my position would like to stay. But I can't." As he said this, he rose. She was seized with panic, and, leaning forward, she grasped his hand and put it to her lips. " Don't go," she begged. And without realizing what she was saying, added : " I have a feeling that if you stayed I would fall in love with you."

" I have to go for strict military reasons," he explained. And he added with a smile, though not maliciously : " Tomorrow you'll have someone else and forget all about me."

She didn't dare contradict him, and she followed him wearily and sadly, fixing her hair and biting her lips. The officer put on his cape, took a torch from the pocket, and went to the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs the bright beam of the torch lit up the muddy side of the car in the darkness of the garden.

They went down the last steps.

" Good-bye," said the officer, holding out his hand.

" Good-bye," she answered, shaking it. And she added : " Get in. I'll open the gate for you."

The officer got in and started up the car. Meanwhile the woman ran to open the gate ; she needed all her strength to throw open the two sides. The car backed into the road.

Then she suddenly remembered that, after she had opened the gate the first time, she had gone to look at the hen-run. How swollen with dignity the hen had been before love-making ! And how equally swollen with dignity she had been afterwards. And how quickly she had liberated herself of love—a ruffle of the feathers and all was over. But, at the same time, how false that dignity had seemed to her, and how contemptible the ruffling of the feathers.

She started as she heard the car move off into the night. She shut the gate, one side after the other, and made for the front door. " With dignity and a ruffle of the feathers," she thought, as she went in.

* * *

The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong—but that's the way to bet.

DAMON RUNYON

Famous Novels in Outline

TRILBY

A Story of Paris in the 'Nineties

by GEORGE DU MAURIER

As this month's suggestion for holiday reading, Argosy offers a best-seller of other days, by the grandfather of one of our own best-selling novelists, Daphne du Maurier. Set in the romantic artists' quarter of Paris, on the Left Bank, as George du Maurier knew it from his own days as an art student there, "Trilby" had as great a success, on the stage and as a novel, as did its young relative, "Rebecca."

★

IN the large Latin Quarter studio which Taffy, Sandy, and Little Billee share, the three students are entertaining Svengali, an unconventional musician, and Gecko, a fiddler. Suddenly there is a knock on the door. An artist's model comes in; on hearing the music she decided to look in.

She is wearing a mixture of clothing—a soldier's coat, a pair of men's shoes, a frilled petticoat—and she carries her lunch. When she begins to sing, her voice is so flat that the listeners do not know whether to be amused or embarrassed. Only Svengali realizes the quality of her untrained voice.

Svengali goes one morning to borrow money from Sandy. Trilby is in the studio when he arrives. Because she complains of a headache, Svengali hypnotizes her. Sandy, thinking of the control Svengali might have over Trilby, is alarmed.

Trilby comes more often to the studio. She cooks for the three Englishmen, darns their clothing, joins in their meals and parties. In return they teach her how to speak correct English and treat her as a sister. When Sandy falls ill, Trilby refuses to let anyone else look after him.

Svengali has a stroke of luck when he is hired for a series of concerts. He is anxious to hypnotize the model again, but the three Englishmen will not permit it.

Because Trilby poses in the nude, Little Billee, who has fallen in love with her, becomes angry and leaves Paris. Trilby, unhappy at this turn of events, becomes a laundress.

She begins to take care of her appearance, so that when Little

Billee returns he is completely charmed by her. At Christmas Trilby promises to marry him. But a few days later his mother and a clergyman arrive and make Trilby promise that she will not marry Little Billee.

Trilby leaves Paris. Little Billee falls ill and, with his mother and sister, returns to England.

Five years pass. Little Billee achieves success in London. Sandy and Taffy travel on the continent. When the three friends meet again at a ball in London, there is much talk of old days in Paris.

Word goes round that Svengali has found a great pupil, that he has married her and is making a famous singer of her.

Little Billee paints more pictures and falls in and out of love with a girl called Alice. The other two friends go their ways.

At last the three meet in Paris. During their stay they attend the first performance of the famous singer, La Svengali, in Paris and discover that she is their Trilby of earlier days.

Under the hand of her master she has developed a great voice that thrills her audience. The three Englishmen are overcome.

The next day when they see Trilby and Svengali in the park, Little Billee runs up to greet her. She looks at her old friends vaguely, listens to something Svengali says to her, and then, to their surprise, glances coldly at them as if she had never seen them before.

The next day Little Billee encounters Svengali, who spits on him. A fight begins, in which the tall musician is more than a match for the small artist. Then Taffy appears. With one hand he seizes Svengali's nose, and with the other he slaps him on the cheek. Svengali is only too glad to escape. A few days later the Englishmen leave for home.

When Svengali brings his star to London, she is the talk of the city. Little Billee and his friends buy tickets for her first concert.

At the last minute the concert is cancelled. Svengali has scolded Trilby past the limit of Gecko's endurance, and Gecko has attacked Svengali with a knife.

At that moment Trilby seems to lose her senses. While her husband remains ill she is incapable of speech, and she spends all her time with him. Svengali will not permit her to leave him either to practise or to sing her concert without him.

At last he recovers. Not well enough to conduct the orchestra, however, he is compelled to occupy a seat in a box facing Trilby as she sings. When Little Billee and his friends arrive, they see Svengali rise from his place with a look of unchanged hatred on his face. Then he slumps forward.

Trilby, led from the wings, takes her place somewhat mechanically. She seems to be looking for Svengali. The orchestra begins her number. She remains indifferent, refusing to sing.

Again and again the orchestra begins to play. At last she demands in her old gutter French, what they want of her. When they say she is to sing, she tells the orchestra to be quiet; she will sing without an accompaniment.

Then she begins in the same flat voice with which she had sung for Little Billee and his friends years before. At once catcalls shake the house.

Terrified, Trilby has to be led away. The confusion increases when someone shouts that Svengali is dead in his box.

The three friends go to Trilby's dressing-room. Finding her frightened, they take her to Little Billee's lodgings, where the next day he and his friends call on her.

Trilby knows nothing of her career as a singer, and she remembers Svengali only as the kindest man in her life. She is pale and seems vastly aged. She tells them that Svengali offered to look after her when she left Paris. He had not married her, however, for he already had a wife and three children. As Trilby talks, her mind seems disturbed beyond recovery, and a doctor is called in.

Gecko goes to prison for striking Svengali. Svengali's money, which Trilby had earned, goes to his wife and children.

Each afternoon the three friends go to visit Trilby. She is by now so weak that it is only in an occasional smile or gesture that she reveals to them the gay, carefree Trilby of other days in Paris.

One day a large life-like photograph of Svengali is shown her. She begins to sing and charms her listeners to tears with the sadness of her song. Then she falls asleep. A doctor, summoned immediately, says she has been dead for a quarter of an hour or more.

Years later Taffy and his wife, Little Billee's sister, meet Gecko in a café in Paris, and he tells them of Svengali's influence over Trilby. Svengali had hypnotized the girl, and made her a singing automaton of matchless voice. When the spell was broken, there was no Trilby, Gecko claims, for Svengali had destroyed her soul. Taffy and his wife tell him how Little Billee had died shortly after Trilby's death. There is little any of them can say. They can only wonder at the strangeness and sadness of Trilby's story.

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 1

Prize-winners will be announced next month.

TABLE FOR TWO

There is no love sincerer than the love of food

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

But who is to tell whether a girl will make an industrious woman ? How is the purblind lover especially, to be able to ascertain whether she, whose smiles and dimples, and bewitching lips have half bereft him of his senses ; how is he able to judge, from anything that he can see, whether the beloved object will be industrious or lazy ? Look a little at the labours of the teeth, for these correspond with those of the other members of the body, and with the operations of the mind. Get to see her at work upon a mutton-chop, or a bit of bread and cheese ; and if she deal quickly with these, you have a pretty good security for that activity, that stirring industry, without which a wife is a burden instead of a help. And as to love, it cannot live for more than a month or two (in the breast of a man of spirit) towards a lazy woman.

WILLIAM COBBETT, *Advice to Young Men*, 1829

Loving Cup

A feast being spread in spring-time,
With a cup of green wine and a joyous song,
I repeat my salutation and offer my three wishes :
First, may you have a long life ;
Second, may I have good health ;
Third, may we live as the swallows on the beam,
Happily together all the year round.

FÊNG YEN-CHI, *d.* 960, *Her Birthday*,
translated by CH'U TA-KAO

En Casserole

The smell of the casserole came up the alley and Pietro said : " *Mama mia*, I am hungry."

She did not reply, and it was only when she opened the door of the cottage that he realized that the delicious smell came from her stove. She switched on the light and took the cover off and

breathed in the odour of the casserole and nodded to herself and spoke. " I must dry my hair. I shall not be long."

She warmed a towel on the stove, then went into her room and left the door open. Pietro saw the roses in the bowl near the bed and watched her rub the hair in the glow of the lamp. Then she went out of sight and when she came back she had changed her bodice for a silk blouse. Her skin glowed through the silk and her red lips were moist in the eye. " *Mama mia*," Pietro thought, " she is a pretty girl ! " She tasted the dish in the casserole from a copper spoon and sprinkled in chopped leaves that smelled like bay. Then in silence she laid two places at the table and put the plates to warm on the hollow lid of the casserole. She stood a bottle of red wine and brought a crust loaf nearly a yard long and cracked it in her hands.

" Look, it is fresh. I got it from the oven at the baker's."

The bread smelled of hunger and Pietro watched her supple hands as she broke the loaf. All she did surprised him, and he was astonished to find the casserole ready on the stove. Then she served the dish into the deep plates and Pietro tasted it and felt his mouth run in delight. There was chicken and squares of bacon and kidney in the juice that was rich in many things.

" You've got an angel in your mouth," said Pietro, and broke a crust and drank wine to clean his palate of the salt in the sea.

She was detached and silent but gave him once or twice a smile to make him welcome at the table. They finished the casserole and she got up to brew the coffee and said : " I was hungry. I got lost in my book and I forgot to have my supper."

But Pietro could guess at her mind now and knew that she had waited for him.

VIVIAN CONNELL, *September in Quinze*

The Way to his Heart

Food,
Just food,
Just any old kind of food.
Let it be sour
Or let it be sweet,
As long as you're sure it is something to eat.
Go purloin a sirloin, my pet,
If you'd win a devotion incredible ;
And asparagus tips vinaigrette,
Or anything else that is edible . . .

OGDEN NASH, *The Clean Platter*

Love Token

He was sitting in his room waiting for the town clock to strike four, because when it did he had to go out and meet his truelove, whose name was Edith Plush. His own name was Thomas Henrick, but he was known as Burke in that family. At last hearing the hour strike, he snatched up a felt hat, and putting it on his greasy head started off to meet his truelove.

When he reached Mionge Lane he met his pretty truelove skipping along most lady-like and primly. She was dressed in a light blue dress with a white sash tied at the side in two knots. Her long fair hair hung down her back tied with a pink ribbon, and her fringe was fluttering in the breeze. Behind her fringe she wore a wreath of green ivy. In one hand she carried a leghorn hat with red and blue ribbon, and in the other a silken bag filled with a threepenny bit and two biscuits, and her age was nineteen.

"Well my pretty bird," she said as she approached Burke, "I hope you will like to 'manger' a biscuit with me." (I may add that she was fond of French.)

"Thank you Edith," he said, "I will have one if it's a cracknell."

Then Edith burst into a fit of tears and howled out, "Oh, but they are Osbornes."

"Well to dry up those moist tears, I will eat one," said Burke.

"You dear!" said Edith like sunshine after rain, for the smiles had come on her face, as she opened her silken bag and popped one into his blistered hand. After this Burke and Edith walked along down the lane, which I forgot to say was shaded by trees all along.

DAISY ASHFORD, *A Short Story of Love and Marriage*

A Deux

Fast falls the snow, O lady mine,
Sprinkling the lawn with crystals fine,
But by the gods we won't repine
While we're together,
We'll chat and rhyme, and kiss and dine,
Defying weather.

So stir the fire and pour the wine,
And let those sea-green eyes divine
Pour their love-madness into mine:
I don't care whether
'Tis snow or sun or rain or shine
If we're together.

MORTIMER COLLINS, 1827-1876

DAFFYDILLY

This was something against which mere physical force was of no avail

by WILLIAM WALLACE IRWIN

DO I believe in black magic? Wel-l-l, if by black magic you mean the possibility of maiming or slaying your enemy at a distance and without coming in actual contact with him, I certainly do believe in that—and for a good reason. Anyone can do it, but at a price, and a high one.

Our forefathers spoke of selling one's soul to the Devil, and in their poetic way they expressed a simple fact. The price is often poverty and misery, and always insanity and death. Black magic is so dangerous that the mere student of it often comes to a violent and sometimes a mysterious end.

It was about ten years ago that, returning to New York after many years spent in the waste places of the world, I dropped in on my old friend the great geologist and mining engineer, Patrick Gordon de Suza. Pat and I had been friends since the days when we used to squabble over marble games, but in later years, although we both wandered far, our paths had seldom crossed, and—man-like—we corresponded at intervals of five years or so. He opened the apartment door himself and at the sight of my face let out a yell, "*Bill*, you old son-of-a-gun! Where did you drop from? Come in. I *am* glad to see you!" And he hugged me to his broad chest until I thought a couple of ribs would snap—he never could remember his great strength.

He led me into the book-lined living-room, calling, "Graciosa, Graciosa! Come and see who's here!" and to me, "I want you to meet my wife."

At the call there entered a young woman, tiny, dark, beautiful, frail, and feline. While we shook hands we sized each other up, and I instantly and intuitively felt that I had been weighed and found wanting. In life there are many delicate situations, but there is none more delicate than your standing with an old friend's new wife.

Pat was a short man with huge shoulders; from his Portuguese ancestors he had inherited a dense black beard that began just below his eyes, and rather than fight it twice a day with a razor, he had let it grow, and trimmed it square halfway down his chest.

Graciosa was tiny—he could have held her seated on one of his great paws; she was beautiful, with a smooth olive skin and such masses of shining black hair piled high over her small face that one wondered how her slender neck could bear the weight. But she was evil, and she hated me at sight. Don't ask me how I knew, but I was sure of it.

You folks who live in cities are so sheltered that most of you have lost that sixth sense that protects savages and those others who spend their lives in a more primitive environment. Gamblers call the thing a hunch; but call it what you will, it exists—and on this occasion it saved my life.

She was cordial enough, but all my senses were on the alert, and while we chattered banalities and she came in and out of the room bringing the whisky and soda, I watched both Pat and herself. When she was away he was the uproarious, full-blooded, witty rascal I had always known, but the instant she entered, his tone dropped, and his eyes fawned on her with that mixture of affection and fear that we see in a spaniel gazing on a severe master.

We sat in front of the fire-place and rapidly ran over our doings since the last meeting some five years earlier. Pat told me of an interesting trip he had made for Mineralogy Inc. into Northern Rhodesia on the headwaters of the Zambesi.

"It was just after our marriage, and Graciosa insisted on coming. It was pretty tough on her, alone in camp all day while I was out prospecting, but she picked up the local tongue and passed the time studying native superstitions; in fact, she did so well that she got quite chummy with the tribal witch-doctors. At least, she was chummy for a time, and then suddenly they dropped her, for no reason that I could ever find out. Queer devils, those Central African natives. I have tried to get her to write an article for the Anthropological Society, but she never . . ."

His voice trailed off, and I noticed that his wife was looking at him, very fixedly.

Pat shook his head, like a man brushing off an insect or an unpleasant thought, and then said, as if with an effort, "Show him Daffydilly." Smiling, the tiny woman brought from a corner of the room where it had been lying on a huge Gothic chair, a grotesque marionette, about two feet high, that was suspended by fine silk threads from a little bar of light wood. By manipulating the threads she made it walk across the floor, bow and touch its cap to me; so expert was she that the puppet seemed to be actually alive.

I commented on this, and Pat said, "That's what the natives thought, and I began to think that it was Daffydilly that scared the witch-doctors away. Anyhow, one of them told my gun-bearer

to warn me that the thing was evil; he even suggested that I should burn it."

I picked up the manikin to examine it; it was clad in a sort of mandarin coat of bright orange, blue Chinese trousers, and on the bag of cotton that represented its head was a brown silk night-cap.

"I made it out of what odds and ends I could find about the tent," said the lady, "but in Central Africa you have little choice. His cap is a piece of a torn stocking, his coat is from a blouse, and his trousers were cut from one of Pat's scarves. At first his arms bothered me; they were too flabby and bent in the wrong places, but I reinforced them with the silk girdle from an old dressing-gown, and now they are the strongest part of him. You could hang a man with one of those cords."

She saw me look at the doll's face, and smiled, "I'm not much of an artist, am I?" The features that had been embroidered in coloured silks on the cotton-stuffed ball which served as a head were such as might have been drawn by a none too clever child, and, while the mouth was stretched in a broad grin, the general effect of the face was not pleasant—for some reason it made me feel that the witch-doctors might be right.

Subsequent visits convinced me that Graciosa had a strong and strange influence over Pat. When he was alone with me he was his old loud, jolly, dare-devil self, but the very instant that his wife entered and looked at him, he became—well, "spaniel" was still the only term that seemed to fit.

Time after time I arranged to meet him somewhere outside, but he always called it off later, for one reason or another. Once, when I knew that his wife was at a concert, I went round to his apartment and found him hard at work on an article he was preparing for the *Engineering Journal.*

"Come on Pat," I said, "it's a heavenly afternoon, let's take a walk, have a drink at the club, and then phone Graciosa to meet us for dinner. You've worked enough for today."

He jumped at the idea, and we had the first free and—if I may so put it—"uninfluenced" conversation since my return to the city.

Pat talked as he had in the days before his marriage, when we had few if any secrets from one another. His wife came from a very ancient Neapolitan family, her maiden name being Tofana; her mother had died in giving her birth and she had been brought up by her father. The latter was a recluse and a student of occultism, who brought up his daughter as an agnostic.

"The old man Tofana met his death in a manner that has never been satisfactorily explained. They found him lying dead with his head on a parchment folio that he seemed to have been studying,

but the horrible thing was that his head had been twisted until his face was looking at you from between his shoulders. And this in a garret room with the door locked and the key on the inside. The papers made quite a fuss at the time but the police never found an explanation.

He hesitated, as one who is listening to a distant sound ; then, " I'm sorry, Bill," he said, " we'll have to put off the drink and dinner, I've just remembered something I must do at home."

He left me abruptly, and as he dashed off I looked at my watch ; it was about the time that his wife should have arrived back at the apartment.

The next time I saw him was one evening when I dropped in for a drink and a chat before going to dinner. Graciosa's eyes glared at me like those of an angry cat, although her smile was delightful and her speech courteous.

She made Daffydilly dance in a manner so comic that it made us roar ; then he walked over and clasped me around the leg with his little arms and at the same time made the gesture of kicking me with one of the cotton balls that served him for feet.

" Watch him carefully, Bill. He doesn't like you ! " chortled Pat.

Nothing else of importance occurred that evening and Graciosa seemed to be trying to be cordial. When in serving me she broke a glass, which grazed my hand, she was so apologetic that it was embarrassing. She insisted on sponging away the drop of blood and putting some antiseptic on the trifling wound.

It must have been two weeks later when I next saw the de Suzas ; they had been to the theatre and were walking home in the pleasant spring night when I overtook them on Broadway. I joined them, and we strolled to where they lived in the West Sixties ; here Pat and, rather to my surprise, Graciosa insisted that I come in for a night-cap. Everything was as it had always been in the big home-like living-room, but something inside me cried in an imperative voice, *Look out ! Danger !*

Graciosa was sweeter and more friendly than I had ever known her to be. Pat was lounging in a big chair and I was standing with my back to the empty fire-place when she brought me a highball that she had mixed herself. I declined it, but she stood on tiptoe to pat my cheek with her slender fingers, pleading, " Please take it, Bill. To please me. It'll make you sleep well." Her voice was low and musical, but her eyes were hard and alert.

I allowed myself to be persuaded, but the instant that I had the glass in my hand, even stronger than before, came the feeling of danger, and I resolved that in no circumstances would I taste that

drink. " All right, if you insist, honey child," I said, " but at least give me a pretzel to crunch with it." The moment she left the room, turning slightly so that Pat could not see, I let the glass slip from my hand and crash on the hearthstone. Of course, I was all apologies, but it was an omen, I said, and not even for so lovely a lady would I take another drink that night. She smiled and purred and flattered me, but her eyes were blazing like those of an angry cat.

As I went down the stairs—Pat's apartment was on the second floor—I thought how like a cat she was; beautiful, graceful, purring and caressing you when she wanted something, but always cold, calculating, and alone inside.

I crossed the street at once, instinctively putting as much space as I could between the lady and myself, and then I looked back . . . and it was well for me that I did.

One of the apartment windows was raised, and as I looked, something dark and vague in form crawled over the sill and began to descend the wall of the house. The street lights happened to cast a shadow there, but the object resembled a gigantic spider lowering itself by its thread. Physical courage I have—this is not boasting; I have been in many tight spots where only the thickness of a hair was between me and death, and I know how I felt and acted—but at that instant I felt fear as I had never known it before. Not the sane and natural fear of physical injury, but the fear of something mysterious and evil; something against which simple physical force, as represented by a knife or a gun, was of no avail.

By a great effort I got control of my body, which wanted to shriek and run. I told myself, " That sort of evil can do you no harm as long as you do not fear to face it." Today I am not so sure that this is true, but it helped me at the time.

Slowly I walked east to the Park, watching the thing from the corner of my eye. It followed along the opposite side of the street, bobbing a bit in its gait but as silent as a shadow. When anyone passed, it would lie like a bit of rubbish in the gutter, but would later hurry to make up for lost time. When it crossed the brightly lit asphalt of Central Park West my suspicions were confirmed: it was that absurd manikin Daffydilly, but a Daffydilly filled with a demoniac life and intent on some fiendish end that boded me no good. He trotted fast and silently on all fours, trailing behind him the silken thread by which he had been lowered from the window.

I had lived long in Paris where many strange cults are rife; I was aware that in Lyons Satanism had been practised since Roman days; and I had a vague acquaintance with the *hexing* among the Pennsylvania Dutch, and I knew of the *envoûtement* practised by the French witches of Brittany and Provence, but to find genuine and deadly black magic in noisy New York, on

asphalt, among taxis, sky-scrapers and electric signs—it was impossible! And there was that foolish Daffydilly, nothing but a bunch of silken rags stitched together, yet now filled with a malevolent life and obviously following me for a purpose that I could not guess but knew to be malignant.

Like a scared child, I fled before that devil-haunted doll, entering unthinkingly the ditch that Sixty-fifth Street makes where it crosses Central Park like a great roofless tunnel. Once I had started on that route there was no turning back, for Daffydilly began to close up the distance that separated us, and on either hand rose steep, unscalable, stone walls.

As I sped along, the panic fear left me and I began to reason . . . It is evident that the evil is to be a physical one, or there would be no need to send the bewitched puppet . . . Therefore I am safe as long as it cannot get at me . . . She does not want him to touch me in the street for fear of witnesses . . . If I can only reach my room and lock him out, I shall be safe for the night.

At Fifth Avenue the lights were for me but against the puppet fifty feet behind; nevertheless, it started to cross, and I remember thinking, "Evidently, they have no traffic lights in Hell." A car swept down on it, the driver probably taking the doll for a bit of wind-blown rubbish, and my hopes rose . . . But the manikin dropped flat, and the wheels did not touch him.

The doors of the house in the East Sixties where I had a room and a bath were of plate glass set in steel, and I had my key in my hand long before I raced up the flight of brownstone steps that led to them. Once safe inside, I turned to watch; Daffydilly came up the steps at the same even pace that he had kept across the Park, and it was evident that he had not been given the gift of sight, for he tried to walk directly through the door. When he found that his progress was opposed by an impenetrable obstacle, he rose on his legs and walked backwards and forwards, pawing at the glass with his hands, which were now all torn and dirty from his trip across the town.

I could hear the rubbing of his little paws on the glass, like the sound of an insect trying to get through a window-pane, and—it may have been my nerves—his foolish, embroidered grin seemed more life-like and more evil than ever before.

Entering my room and locking the door, I rushed to the window, which was open to the warm spring night, but, before closing it, I stuck my head out and looked down. Daffydilly was climbing up the face of the building!

Slowly, clumsily, and with obvious effort, but nevertheless steadily, the absurd but demoniac doll was mounting to my window. Once or twice he seemed to slip, but he always caught himself, and

continued to climb. Although I was drenched with the perspiration of fear, I made a resolution and—repeating to myself, "If you fear him you are lost"—stood a little back from the window and waited.

It was possibly five minutes that I waited, but they seemed as many years, and if my hair had been anything but blond, I think that it would have turned white in that interval. Finally I saw one of his dirty and harmless-looking little paws reach the edge of the sill, and he hoisted himself up. Without hesitation he crossed, dropped into the room, stood erect, and came directly to me. I had the courage to wait and see his intention. He clasped his arms round my left leg, and started to climb me as one climbs a tree.

I stooped to tear his arms free and found that they were as strong as wire ropes. It took all my strength to unloose the grip in which they held my leg, and the next morning I found a purple bruise circling the calf. The blind and evil force with which his whole being was filled was fearfully strong, and the creature thrashed and writhed in my hands like a newly-caught octopus. Snatching a blanket—luckily folded at the foot of the bed—I wrapped him in it, but so indomitable was the force of evil that I was forced to stand on him before I could tear my wrist free from his snake-like clutch.

Once I had him wrapped in the blanket, I rolled it tightly and tied the ends with heavy cord, but even then the demon continued to struggle, as I could see by the unceasing pulsation of the bundle. Then I left and spent the rest of the night at an hotel.

If Graciosa had only waited half an hour before launching her demon on my trail, he would have climbed silently through my bedroom window, and the next morning I should have been found strangled in my bed . . . and later another unsolved mystery would have been added to the police records of New York. No doubt she hated me because my influence over Pat partially counteracted hers, and because of his obvious fondness for me—she may even have loved him, in her fashion—and maybe she was a bit alarmed because I had dropped the—yes, I was now sure of the word—*poisoned* drink. Probably she simply *had* to do something to relieve her over-tense nerves.

Poison . . . suddenly it came to me . . . her family name . . . and they were from Naples. She was surely descended from La Tofana, a worthy soul who, about 1730, was living peaceably in a Neapolitan convent when her sins caught up with her. Before the executioner did his final job, she admitted that probably at least six hundred persons had died from the effects of the *Manna di Nicola di Bari*, a colourless and odourless liquid that she manufactured and sold in tiny vials. If you could by any means get

four drops of that fluid inside a person you disliked, all your troubles were over. In a short time your enemy would die, and for no particular reason that, in those days, anyone could discover.

In the morning I went to see a priest.

"Father," I said, "it concerns a case of witchcraft. There is no need to go into details, but a life is at stake. Whom do you advise me to see?"

He gazed at me calm-eyed. "Are you sure of the facts? Is there no other possible explanation?"

"Father, look at me. Do I show any signs of excitement, insanity, or alcohol?"

He shook his head, with the faintest ghost of a smile.

"Then I tell you, Father, that last night a doll climbed up the face of the house where I live, and tried to strangle me."

Calmly, he rose. "Wait here, my son, while I telephone."

In a few minutes he returned with a piece of paper in his fingers. "Go to that address and ask for Father Calixte. He will be expecting you. May God protect you, my son."

Father Calixte proved to be a tall, swarthy man, lean as a skeleton, and having the great, domed skull that one usually associates with scientists; his most noticeable feature was a pair of very black, penetrating eyes, overhung by a solid bar of eyebrow traversing his face like a strip of black fur.

"Tell me your story as you would tell it to a doctor—which, as a matter of fact, I am—and waste no words. In cases of *envoûtement*, time is the essence of a counter-attack."

When I had finished, he looked at me a moment and asked sharply, "Did Mrs. de Suza ever get possession of a nail-clipping, a lock of your hair, or a drop of your blood?"

"Why, of course not," I said . . . and then I remembered the scratched hand and the bit of cotton wool with which she had wiped the scratch.

"I thought so," said the priest. "The trick is old, and so well-known in my native Corsica that, whenever a wound is dressed, every drop of blood is burnt.

"The interesting thing is the sending of the doll; that technique is oriental and seldom heard of in Europe. Do you know anything of the lady's antecedents?"

I related what Pat had said of her family, and spoke of the drink that I had not taken.

"Related to La Tofana, eh? You did well not to take her drink. But that accounts for the *sending*; La Tofana was supposed to have an oriental strain in her veins. Your friend's wife is a most dangerous woman. Witchcraft of all kinds has lately been becoming rife here

on the Atlantic seaboard—but most of it, I find, is of the lowest and most crude type of black magic.

" Mrs. de Suza is the first really dangerous witch that I have located, and it may be difficult to defeat her malignant and evil purpose . . . and, incidentally, to save you; for, as you seem to realize, you are in great peril, my son."

He half closed his eyes, as one considering a problem, then . . . " Pick me up here at nine this evening, it will be dark by then. In the meantime, go into a church and pray; it will strengthen both yourself and me."

I met him at the appointed hour, and we took a taxi to the house where I had left Daffydilly. When I started to unlock the door of my room, he pulled me back, and his fingers on my arm were like steel rods.

" Don't run into danger, my son. We must take every precaution, because we are dealing with satanic forces more powerful and more malignant than anything you can imagine . . . even after what happened last night."

He drew from one pocket a large crucifix and hung it round his neck; from another pocket he drew a stole which he placed over his shoulders, saying, " These are only symbols and have no force except from the faith in the Almighty with which I am filled. In this faith, I have no fear in confronting Satan as I am about to do. A final warning: keep always behind me. On no account get between me and the demon."

Raising his arm, he made a great sign of the cross on the door, and then he nodded to me to open it.

The rolled blanket lay where I had left it, the unceasing struggles of the restless fiend making it beat like an uneasy heart. Intoning sonorous Latin syllables, the priest advanced and touched the bundle with his crucifix. Instantly the thing was still, and at a sign —keeping well behind him as instructed—I reached out and cut the cords that bound the package.

When the blanket was unrolled, Daffydilly lay quite still but rigid as a poker. He looked just as harmless as ever, but one could feel evil radiating from him like heat from a stove. Fumbling in a pocket, the priest brought forth a small crucifix attached to a piece of wire, which he wrapped tightly around the doll. And only when this was done did he drop the larger crucifix which, till then, he had held constantly in his hand, as though it were a weapon with which he might have to defend himself at any moment.

Once bound to the little crucifix, the doll became as helpless and limp as he had been when I first saw him. Picking him up, Father Calixte examined him with the interest of a biologist who

has discovered a new and curious specimen.

The back of Daffydilly's head seemed to interest him particularly, and he ejaculated under his breath, "I thought so!" Then to me, "See that head; it has been cut open and hastily restitched. Lend me your penknife." He carefully cut the stitches and, probing with the point of the blade, finally withdrew a ball of cotton wool the size of a marble and stained a rusty brown.

"There!" he said. "That's the bit of cotton with which the lady so thoughtfully wiped your scratched hand. Burn it at once."

When, with the assistance of my cigarette-lighter and an ashtray, I had accomplished this, Father Calixte said gravely, "It was that drop of your blood that served to guide the demon to you; now the evil will depart. You may praise the Almighty, my son; His power has conquered and you are saved."

Opening the window, he laid the flaccid Daffydilly on the sill, and knelt in prayer. Most of the ceremony which followed was meaningless to me, and my Latin had become so fragmentary from age and disuse that it was only at moments that I could gather what the priest was saying.

Holding his great crucifix in his right hand extended over the doll, with his left the priest untwisted the wire that held the little cross in place. For an instant he paused, then snatching the small cross away, he said in Latin, "I bid thee go!"

Once more I could feel the radiation of evil as the silly doll scrambled slowly and clumsily to its feet, once more I saw its foolish, dirty little cotton-stuffed paws gripping the window-sill as it lowered itself over the edge, and, looking out a few minutes later, once more I could see it trotting silently on all fours along the gutter, but this time returning whence it had come.

When I withdrew my head, Father Calixte was just rising from his knees; with a gesture he stopped my stammering efforts to say all that was in my heart. "The praise is not due to me, my son. And now, good-bye. Don't come with me; I prefer to be alone after such a battle."

I never saw him again.

The next morning I was awakened a little after seven o'clock by the telephone. It was Pat, and his voice sounded strange, "Oh Bill! Something dreadful has happened! Come round as soon as you possibly can. I won't do anything until I see you." He hung up before I could question him.

When I reached the apartment, Pat let me in.

"Oh Bill, I'm so glad you have come. Go into her room and look, and tell me what to do. Should I call the police? I don't want to see it again. It's too horrible!"

His manner was strange: while undoubtedly deeply moved,

he acted like a man just awakened from a nightmare.

Walking into the bedroom, I at once understood what it was that Pat did not want to see again. Graciosa lay in her bed, strangled by Daffydilly.

In her struggle she had torn him to rags—he no longer existed as a doll—but the silken cords that had served him for arms were twisted tightly and deeply round her slender neck. The awful thing was the expression on her dead face, and, like Pat, having once seen it, I did not want another look.

Gone was every trace of her marvellous, tender beauty, and in its place there was the face of a fiend from Hell itself, the upper lip raised in a snarl that showed her teeth, and an expression of such hate as I have never seen on a living face.

With one of Pat's handkerchiefs I hid that awful head and returned to the living-room, where I found my friend deeply shaken, but looking strangely relieved.

"Tell me what happened, Pat."

"I don't know, Bill. As always, I rose at six-thirty, put the coffee on, washed and dressed, and at seven went in to wake her. I saw what you have just seen, so I telephoned you and waited."

"But how do you account for it?" I asked.

"Oh, very simply. She always kept Daffydilly hanging over the head of her bed, and she was always having nightmares. Also, she had been taking treatment for a bad heart. Something made poor Daffydilly fall on her face, and the other two factors combined to make the tragedy. It was a sort of involuntary suicide."

But the coroner called it accidental death.

* * *

ANSWERS to THE LADY SAID—YES on page 56

1. *Juliet, in the play, "Romeo and Juliet," by William Shakespeare.*
2. *Maria, the "little rabbit," and the American, Robert Jordan, in "For Whom the Bell Tolls," by Ernest Hemingway.*
3. *Miss Wardle and Mr. Tupman in Dickens' "Pickwick Papers."*
4. *The Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax and John Worthing, J.P., in "The Importance of Being Earnest," by Oscar Wilde.*
5. *Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler in "Gone With the Wind," by Margaret Mitchell.*
6. *The conditional acceptance of Mirabell by Mrs. Millamant in "The Way of the World," by William Congreve.*
7. *Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester in the novel by Charlotte Brontë.*
8. *Robert Poste's child, Flora, and her second cousin, Charles Fairford, in "Cold Comfort Farm," by Stella Gibbons.*

The Third Part of

SCHOOL FOR DANGER

by MICHAEL GILBERT

★

Mr. Wetherall, headmaster of South Borough High School, finds himself caught in a web of strange coincidences.

Why should Luigi, proprietor of his favourite restaurant, regret having told him about the black marketeers who are ruining his business? Why does Sergeant Donovan, brother of his secretary Peggy, refuse to tell the police who smashed up his home and murdered his pretty wife? Why, when he goes to tell Peter Crowdy, one of his pupils, that he has found him a good job, does his father throw him out of the house for snooping? And why is the father found dead on the railway line very shortly after?

Sending the boy to safety, Mr. Wetherall reluctantly decides to explore the possible links in this odd chain of events. He visits Jock's Pull-In, and later the Double Four, a dubious Soho pub, owned by a strange character called Annie. All the while, a feeling that he is getting into greater and greater personal danger grows in him. At a night club, Mr. Wetherall is followed by two men, and escapes only to find them waiting in the street. They beat him up, and demand to know where Peter Crowdy is.

When he hears of Mr. Wetherall's adventures, Duncan Robarts, the famous editor of the Kite, *tells his sub-editor Todd to keep an unofficial eye on the whole*

business. Mr. Wetherall has evidently stumbled into something big—slap up against those organizers of the black market whose identity Superintendent Huth and even Chief Superintendent Hazlerigg would greatly like to know.

The red light flashes! An identity parade "fails." No one dares to pick out Mr. Wetherall's attackers, Sailor Jackson and Red Whittaker. Sergeant Donovan, after "busting up" Pop Maunder of Jock's Pull-In and making him talk, is a prisoner in his own home, in danger of his life from Pop's food-gang (and in disgrace with the police). In the Double Four, Todd observes some of the queer customers, and also Annie's collection of patent medicines. Can she be receiving black market money and passing it to Hollomans Cures Ltd.? Hollomans advertises for a smart boy. Young Sammy Donovan, the Sergeant's brother, decides to apply—and keep his eyes open!

★

MR. BERTRAM, who was Mr. Wetherall's solicitor, and the sole surviving partner in Messrs. Bertram and Moule, rang the bell for his assistant. "I've changed my mind," he said. "I'll go down to Bush House myself about Mr. Wetherall's inquiry."

Mr. Bertram reached for his bowler hat and tittupped thoughtfully down the stairs and out into Fleet Street. Around him the traffic roared. So far as he was concerned, it roared unheard. His thoughts were elsewhere.

Mr. Bertram was nobody's fool. Anyone who has prospered as a one-man solicitor's firm in the heart of London must have his wits about him and his ear pretty close to the ground. Names meant a lot to him. The knowledge of who was who and who did what was his stock-in-trade.

Principally, he was thinking about Mr. Wetherall; about the facts which he had mentioned and, even more, about the facts which he had plainly suppressed.

Musing thus, he arrived at Aldwych and turned into Bush House. He paid his shilling, filled in a form, and sat down at a table. He

had not long to wait, and presently he was opening a thin blue folder headed "Hollomans Cures Limited".

He produced a piece of paper and a pencil and jotted down a few notes, his tongue flickering between his lips as he wrote. Formed in 1945. Authorized Capital of one hundred pounds. Issued Capital five pounds. Registered office at 5 Strudwick Road, N.7. The usual memorandum—which generously permitted a company with five pounds capital (and ninety-five more in reserve) to do anything from promoting a luxury hotel to running a liner. Normal Articles. Nothing in the Charges Register. No accounts.

One of the issued shares was held by Mr. Henry Holloman, one by Mrs. Anita Holloman, three by Mr. Arthur Harbart. The directors were Mr. and Mrs. Holloman. The secretary was Mr. Holloman.

Mr. Bertram's pencil paused for a moment in its scribbling. Far down in the distant, undusted recesses of his mind a memory had stirred. He was unable to pin it down. Such a memory was like quicksilver. If you tried to grasp it, it was gone. He pursued it with a growing sense of frustration. A futile attempt. Perhaps he would remember it later, when he had stopped thinking about it.

His pencil resumed its scribbling.

AT HOLLOMANS

On Monday afternoon Sammy started work at Hollomans; on Tuesday evening he wrote a letter to his sister Peggy.

This is a queer sort of place and no mistake if I had known the job meant staying nights I might have thought twice about it Mr. Holloman is a case he looks like Boris Carloff only worse Mrs. Cameroni she is the woman who does for us here is deaf but not a bad old girl I think everyone else is round the bend except me I get off Saturday p.m. and will be with you for tea don't eat all the sanwich spread before I get there Your Loving brother Sammy.

Sammy sealed this with several loving kisses and determined to slip out and put it in the box at the corner of the road, as soon as Mr. Holloman had departed up West on business. So far as he could gather, he usually went out in the evenings and was not expected back before eight.

Precise information was hard to come by. First there was Mrs. Cameroni, who acted as housekeeper to the establishment, got the meals, tidied up, and fussed round generally. She seemed a decent enough person, and for some time, under the impression that she was his employer's wife, Sammy had addressed her as Mrs. Holloman. Nor had she corrected him; simply because, as he had discovered by accident that afternoon, she never heard him; being not only deaf but, like many deaf people, defiant about her infirmity.

Then there were the girls.

Sammy had had great hopes of the girls. There were two of them,

a floppy blonde and a thinner girl with mouse-coloured hair and a band round her teeth. They formed the packing-room staff.

Sammy was fond of girls, in a general sort of way. He liked them better in quantity than singly. He enjoyed the chi-hying and the repartee and the general give-and-take.

Accordingly, during the lunch interval, he had made his way into the packing room. The girls had suspended their packing of Mother Mankeltow's Mucilage of Molasses and were sitting on a bench, eating sandwiches out of a bag.

At first all had gone well; indeed, from the beginning almost too well. Sammy's opening remarks had been received with smiles. Even his ordinary conversation was smiled at. Everything was smiled at. Neither girl seemed to have a great deal of conversation in return. The blonde girl did nothing but smile. The mouse-coloured girl squeaked and said something that sounded like "Ham for lunch," but she mouthed her words so that it was difficult to establish anything beyond the fact that it was an effort at goodwill.

After a few minutes of this, Sammy withdrew.

"Just my luck," he said to himself. "Two girls, and both of them barmy!"

After lunch, he was summoned to the presence and introduced to the more important branches of his work.

"There are certain basic mixtures," explained Mr. Holloman, "that we use in most of our preparations."

He was a tall man, thin, but with obvious strength in his long bones. He had the mottled, peach-veined face of an old country clergyman, white tufts in each nostril, and the shadow of an imperial in the unshaven patch under his full lower lip. His least prepossessing characteristic was his head of hair. If it had been a wig, thought Sammy, it wouldn't have been so bad. But since it clearly wasn't a wig, it looked somehow abnormal and horrible, a wolf's pelt of thick black and grey hair. He had black hairs on the back of his hands, too. His eyes were hot brown, and his voice was like treacle.

"I shan't bother you with all our little technical secrets," went on Mr. Holloman. "But I can see you're a smart boy, so I might as well tell you at once that you will find that most people are fools where their own health is concerned."

Sammy nodded. He felt interested in spite of himself. Such a diagnosis agreed very well with his own observations. He had had an aunt who had spent all her money on an Elixir of Life. It had done her no visible harm, but at ten shillings the bottle it had consumed a great deal of money which, in Sammy's view, she might more profitably have saved and left to her nephews and nieces.

"There's one born every minute," he agreed.

"We have just finished the diarrhœa and prickly heat and are preparing for the coughs and colds. In the profession we refer to them as catarrhal afflictions." Mr. Holloman smiled genially. "We use nothing but simple, wholesome ingredients. Phenol—" he indicated a large, stoppered jar full of a pinkish disinfectant—"and sodium chloride." This was a cardboard box.

"Looks just like salt," said Sammy.

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right," said Mr. Holloman. "Our standard gargle and throat-spray, two shillings and sixpence the bottle, contains one measure of phenol solution—measure it out in that little glass jar—to four measures of sodium chloride. You can use a tablespoon for that. The rest is aqua pura."

"Where do I get that?"

"Out of the tap."

"Do you mean you can sell that stuff for half a dollar a bottle?"

"It is often difficult to meet the demand for it."

"Cor," said Sammy. His respect for Mr. Holloman increased.

"There are, of course, certain overhead expenses, connected with advertising and the like, which you would not appreciate. There is the bottle itself—a scandalous price these days, though we usually succeed in getting them back by offering a small rebate.

"One of your jobs will be to clean the returned bottles. See that you do it thoroughly. Our clients are not of the highest class, and we had a bottle returned the other day nearly one-third full of gin, which I can assure you was *not* in it when it was dispatched. Finally, and possibly of more importance than anything else, there is the label. One to each bottle."

Mr. Holloman extracted a gummed label from a cardboard box. It was quite an imposing and well-printed affair. It had *Hollomans Special Gargle, Mouthwash and Throatwash* in old-fashioned lettering and a portrait of a man with a long beard, an eye-glass, and a high collar. On the left of the portrait was a list, in small print, setting out the honours and awards which had fallen to the gargle in the 'eighties (First prize, Palace of Health, Chicago. Grand Prix. Exposition de Santé, Bruxelles, etc.). On the right, in larger print, was a summary of the conditions which it was guaranteed to cure or alleviate (Catarrh, Hay Fever, Tonsilitis, La Grippe, Pleurisy, Asthma, Biliousness, Constipation, and Consumption).

"The label is most important," said Mr. Holloman. "I should say of paramount importance. And you must be particularly careful to place the right label on the right bottle. Your predecessor had to be asked to leave after an unfortunate incident in which he sent out a dozen of Embrocation for the Legs and Thighs labelled as Blood Tonic. Strictly, and between you and me, the difference in the ingredients was not large, but there was a principle at stake."

Sammy had spent an interesting afternoon. He was no ball of fire at mathematics, but it didn't need an accountant's brain to see the margin of profit in selling salt and water at two and sixpence a bottle. A certain amount of outlay would be needed for printing and advertising, but as soon as that was paid for—

Sammy swam away into a happy day-dream and inadvertently doubled the dosage of phenol in a whole boxful of gargle, which, as Mr. Holloman sharply pointed out, halved the profit, since phenol was virtually the only ingredient which cost anything.

After tea he was introduced to another branch of the trade.

"Ointments, or unguents, as you must learn to call them, are

in a way an even better line than medicine. The trouble about unguents is that it is more difficult to persuade people that they stand in need of them. With medicines it is different. With a little effort," said Mr. Holloman, with a smile that lifted the lip and revealed a row of small, shark-like teeth, " anyone can believe anything about their own insides. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico.* With the external parts it is more difficult.

" I therefore devised what has turned out to be one of my most successful dual remedies. It is to cure harshness, roughness, staleness, or irritation, of the skin. It is also effective against eczema, ringworm, corpulence, and baldness, but these are only by the way. Its main purpose is that you should at once apply it if you feel any uneasiness of any sort about your skin.

" We send it out in two caskets, at half a crown each, with full directions for use. You apply a little from the brown casket, and that brings out the latent condition. In other words, if you had itched a little before, you will now begin to itch like anything. This is not surprising when you consider that the ointment in the first casket contains a high proportion of powdered *rosa canina*, known to the ignorant as itching powder. Five minutes later, when you can bear it no longer, you apply some ointment from the green casket, and the itching stops at once. You are absolutely cured. This line has been so successful that I fear our rivals have paid us the compliment of imitation. Some people have no idea of commercial morality."

Later, when Sammy was thinking of packing up for the day, Mrs. Cameroni blew in. She was a large, cheerful, untidy woman, and to Sammy she represented the only homely touch in the place. If she hadn't been deaf, he decided, she'd have been quite good value. In self-defence she had acquired a certain facility for lip-reading, but principally she followed a system of guessing what you would be likely to be saying. Conversation was a lottery.

" Lovely evening," she said.

" Scrumptious," agreed Sammy.

" That's right. Keep cheerful. Your first job, I expect ? "

Sammy nodded.

" Work hard, and you'll do all right. He don't pay badly. Not but what he can afford to, the money he makes. Comes rolling in. Rolling ! "

" Seems a pretty good racket to me."

" You want to leave those girls alone, though. They're not quite—you know. You wouldn't believe it, one of 'em had a baby just before she came here. It's not right, you know. A girl like that. She ought to be stabilized."

" They're both barmy, aren't they ? "

" Lovely stuff. Why, I'm telling you, he gave me a bottle the other day, free and for nothing. Two and ninepence it'd have cost me in the shop. I rubbed it on my leg, and I was soon skipping round, I can tell you. Felt as if I was on fire . . .

"You just keep your mind on the job, put the bits in like he tells you, and shake it up well, and you'll make your fortune too. It's just what a smart boy like you wants. Get into a profession. Well, I mustn't stand here gossiping all day. Got my husband's supper to cook. Works all day at the National Gas Board and the temper he's in when he comes home in the evening, you wouldn't credit it. Talk about gas!"

After Mrs. Cameroni had gone, Sammy took another look into the packing room. The two girls were finishing for the day, too. One was carefully making up her face at a mirror, the other was sitting on a chair, in a startlingly disengaged attitude, as if someone had put her down there and forgotten about her.

Sammy went back to his room and sat for a few minutes, swinging his legs. He heard the clatter of feet and the banging of the door as the two girls left. He was alone in the house. He was in charge. It was part of his job to look after things in the evenings when Mr. Holloman was out.

Better start doing something, he told himself, or you'll be getting the heeby-jeebies. Even those girls would have been better than nothing. Doing something? It suddenly occurred to Sammy that this was the moment for investigation.

"Don't get into trouble," hadn't Mr. Wetherall said? "But keep your eyes open. Watch out for letters and packets—particularly any with the W.C. postmark on them. See if you can find out what's in them. Notice when Mr. Holloman goes out and try and remember if he says where he's been."

All right. He would keep out of trouble. But there was no harm in snooping around a bit. The house was empty, and he would hear Mr. Holloman's key in the lock in plenty of time to stop doing whatever he might be doing. His spirits rose. There were really only two places for investigation. On the ground floor there was Mr. Holloman's office, and upstairs there was his bedroom. The rest of the house seemed too open for secrets.

The office was the more promising of the two, but here Sammy suffered a check. The door was locked. And not just an ordinary, old-fashioned mortice lock, he noticed (which any of the downstairs keys might have fitted), but a bright, efficient little lock, inset two-thirds of the way up the door; new, and quite outside Sammy's limited attainments as a burglar.

He cast his mind back to the short time he had spent in the office when he had first arrived. He seemed to remember that the window was barred. He went out into the scrubby garden at the side and had a look to make sure. It was barred all right. New-looking bars, and too close together, even for a boy. Upstairs, then.

The house was quiet, and yet, when you really settled down to listen, not entirely quiet. There were very faint creakings and rustlings with occasional rather human gurglings from the old-fashioned water system. Strudwick Road itself was quiet, but distantly from the Holloway Road came the sound of cars.

The bedroom door was not locked. In fact, it stood ajar.

Overcoming a sense of outrage at investigating so private a matter as someone else's bedroom, Sammy went in.

It was full of the usual sort of stuff you expect to find in bedrooms. A double bed, a dressing-table, some flowers on the mantelshelf. Signs, Sammy supposed, of the invisible Mrs. Holloman. Now that he stopped to notice it, the room smelt faintly of woman.

There was a mahogany chest of drawers, with comb and brushes and an old leather collar-box on top, which was plainly Mr. Holloman's territory, and Sammy concentrated first on this. The bottom drawers were full of things like flannel shirts and sensible ankle-length pants, all neatly laundered and folded.

The smaller drawers looked more interesting. The left-hand one was full of socks. One pair looked unnaturally bulky, and Sammy picked it out. It was heavy, too. Which was explained when he unrolled it, and a small, bright-looking automatic pistol fell out on the floor.

Sammy picked it up, remembering to use his handkerchief, rolled it back into the socks, and replaced the socks in the drawer. His confidence had increased. Ordinary people, he argued, did not keep automatic pistols rolled up in their socks.

In the other drawer, under some collars and handkerchiefs, were a lot of papers. Sammy fingered them doubtfully. It would be too dangerous to take them away.

Underneath the papers there was a square of photographs. It was the sort of thing you got from a photographer who took a lot of small pictures and you picked out the ones you wanted and had them enlarged. What was in the drawer was not the whole sheet. It was a piece torn out of it. Sixteen snapshots of a woman, in early middle age. Not bad-looking, in a hard way. Mrs. Holloman, Sammy guessed. She looked the sort of woman who would smell the way that room smelt.

Sammy hesitated again. If he cut off one of the portraits, it was bound to be noticed. Equally so, if he took the lot. Compromise. There was a pair of scissors on the dressing-table. He picked them up and snipped off one complete row of four portraits.

As he put the scissors down, he thought he heard a faint sound in the passage outside.

In a flurry he crammed the photographs into his pocket, shut the open drawer, and bolted out of the room. There was no one in the corridor, and no one downstairs. He went to the front door and opened it. In the short time he had been upstairs dusk had crept over North London, bringing up with it a light haze from the river. Each of the street lamps looked out through a gauzy veil of mist.

He came to the conclusion that he was safer in the street than in the house. He knew that he was not supposed to go out and leave the house empty—or was it empty? He supposed it was. Some sort of excuse was wanted. He felt in his pocket the letter he had written earlier in the evening. That would do. No one could blame him for going out to post a letter to his sister.

He set off down the street.

In spite of his preoccupation he kept his eyes open, because he could no more help observing than he could help breathing.

Strudwick Road was not a very interesting road. It was akin to streets he knew in South London, but more elderly, more changed in decay. The gentility which had once reigned was still there, in the houses, with their false fronts like toupés, their ornamental urns, their unnecessary porticoes with the high front steps which had once raised the gentleman in the parlour above the slavey in the basement.

Had he known it, it was in that district, and in just such a house, that another famous purveyor of patent medicines had lived; and Pentonville Prison, in which Dr. Crippen had died, was not many hundred yards from the end of Strudwick Road.

"Wotter dump!" said Sammy. He dragged his feet round the complete block, up Strudwick Road, turning right into Austerberry Road, and right again into Mutlow Terrace. Here he was momentarily cheered by the sight of the entrance gate and turnstiles of the Elephants' Football Club. He had never got around to watching them play, but they were his League favourites. It gave the place a feeling of home.

At the end of Mutlow Terrace, running at an angle into the Holloway Road, was a short street of shops, small grocers, stationers, tobacconists and the like. They kept no exact hours, and most of them were still open.

Sammy went into the stationer's and bought a large envelope. Into it he pushed the letter he had already written to Peggy, together with the folded row of photographs he had taken from Mr. Holloman's bedroom. Then he stuck down and addressed the large envelope. The Post Office was shut, but Sammy discovered a stamp-machine, ransacked his pockets for a penny and three battered halfpennies, and posted the letter.

The sight of a telephone kiosk gave him an idea. A friend of his who, at the balance of sundry transactions, had owed him ninepence had liquidated the debt by showing him a system by which, with a certain amount of practice, you could ring up from a public telephone without actually putting any money into the machine.

Sammy rang up the school, but got no answer. He then tried Mrs. Wetherall's home and learned from Mrs. Wetherall that her husband was out and not expected back until much later. Feeling that he had nothing to lose, Sammy next tried the office of the *Kite*, and, after some delay, got put through to Mr. Todd. He explained to him what he had been up to.

"He had a gun in his sock drawer, did he? Was it loaded?"

"I didn't look, Mr. Todd."

"Just as well. If it was an automatic you'd just as likely have shot yourself. Any chance of getting into that office?"

"It's always kept locked, except when Mr. Holloman's in it."

"Keep trying," said Todd. "The money's the important thing. Watch what he does with the post in the morning. That should

give you a line." He was about to ring off when another thought struck him. "I think you'd better ring me up every day. When would be best?"

"I get off about four for a cup of tea."

"All right. Ring this extension between four and six every day. If I'm not in, there'll be someone to take a message. And look here—all this ringing up must be costing you something, I don't see why it should come out of your pocket. Let me know at the end of the week—"

"Don't worry about that," said Sammy handsomely.

When he had finished telephoning, he decided to watch the bus stop in the Holloway Road to see if he could spot Mr. Holloman coming back. Luck was with him, and he saw him almost at once, getting off a trolley-bus, carrying a small suitcase.

Doubling round the back way, Sammy got into the house in plenty of time to be sitting quietly in his own room when Mr. Holloman arrived.

Shortly afterwards they had supper together. It was cold stuff, which had been prepared and left for them by Mrs. Cameroni. It was an odd, grown-up sort of meal of meat and pickles and brown ale, and Sammy rather enjoyed it. Mr. Holloman had brought back two evening papers, and they read one each, propped against pickle bottles. There was a good deal less of "don't put your elbows on the table, don't drink with your mouth full of food" than Sammy was used to at home. He felt he was getting on in the world.

Everything was left on the table, presumably for Mrs. Cameroni, when she came in the morning to cook their breakfast.

"You'd better get up to your room now," said Mr. Holloman. "I've got some work to do. Don't go reading to all hours. And don't smoke in bed. The last boy nearly set the house on fire."

"All right," said Sammy. He had never smoked in his life.

He went up to his room. It was after nine o'clock. He decided that the thing to do was to wait until about ten o'clock, then turn the light off, but stay awake. The first part was all right. It was the second bit which caused the difficulty. He had had a long and rather exciting day, and as soon as he lay down, fully clothed as he was, boots and all, he felt himself dozing off.

"This won't do," said Sammy. He sat up and wedged his back against the bars of the bed. There was an iron knob, which dug into him halfway up his backbone, and he reckoned this should keep him awake all right.

At some indefinite time later he woke with a start. The house was quiet, but the street lights were still on, and it was not, he guessed, very late. He was still sitting up. His mouth was dry, and there was a bruise in the middle of his back where the knob had failed to keep him awake. He took his boots off, and sat and listened some more. Then he got up, opened his bedroom door, and went out on the landing.

The linoleum was cold under his stockinged feet, but blessedly silent.

Suppose that Mr. Holloman came suddenly round the corner and asked him what he was doing. What was he doing? He was going to the lavatory. There was a cloakroom and lavatory just inside the front door. No one could be blamed for going to the lavatory.

The stairs were carpeted, and Sammy got down them without making a noise. At the turn of the stairs the door of Mr. Holloman's office came into view, and he saw that there was a light on. Evidently Mr. Holloman was still at work.

When, with infinite care and precaution, he reached the office door, he realized that there was more than one person in the room. Two at least, he thought. He could distinguish Mr. Holloman's dry, conversational tone, and another, much softer; so soft that it was difficult to tell if it was a man or a woman. Also, there was another noise that worried him. It sounded like someone with a heavy cold, snuffling.

Sometimes words came through.

He heard Mr. Holloman say, "I'm sorry," in the tone of voice of someone who was not in the least sorry. And a thin voice saying, "Just a week."

Without stopping to think much about it, Sammy decided that he must have a look. There was a chair in the hall, and he had discovered, in the course of his explorations earlier in the evening, that by standing on it he could just get his eye to the small fan-light. It was frosted glass, but the frosting was inefficient along the bottom edge, and he knew he could see Mr. Holloman's desk.

A few moments later he was in position, his fingers hooked on the dusty lintel. It proved more difficult, this time, probably because he now had no boots on. He strained up on tiptoe, taking his weight on his fingers.

There were three people in the room, and he could see them all. Mr. Holloman was seated behind the desk. In front of him, in a chair, sat the woman of the photograph.

The third occupant of the room was a little grey-haired man, whom Sammy had not seen before. Both Mr. Holloman and the woman were staring at him, and Sammy, unaccountably, felt more frightened than he had ever felt in his life.

The snuffling was explained. The little man was crying.

MR. WETHERALL MAKES UP HIS MIND

Among the letters waiting for Mr. Wetherall when he got home that evening was a legal-looking one from Mr. Bertram. He read it, but absent-mindedly. It recorded the bare results of Mr. Bertram's investigations at the Companies Registry, but did not seem to take matters very much further.

It was evident that Hollomans Cures Ltd. was one of those extremely private companies which are little more than the legal projection of the personality of their founders. Mr. Wetherall understood, in a vague way, that it was a device highly thought of in trade, to turn yourself into a private company, and that somehow

or other it gave you immunity from your debts; which was a desirable thing, come to think of it, in any walk of life.

Beside Mr. Bertram's letter was a note from his wife and an airmail letter from Major Francis. Spelling had never been Mrs. Wetherall's strong point, and her husband was not, therefore, unduly alarmed to read that she had gone out to the "anti-natal clinic". He turned to the air letter.

Dear Folks,

How I wish you could be out here now. The Fall's the best time of year. The colours of the leaves have to be seen to be believed. Don't believe what you see on the travelogues. They don't give you the half of it.

Somehow, Mr. Wetherall felt vaguely comforted as he read it. It was agreeable to think that someone could get excited about the colour of leaves.

When I said that I wished you could be out here, I wasn't just being polite. I really do wish it. Could you and Alice not come over here for a long vacation? Nothing under six months would be worth your while, and maybe you don't have a school vacation that long, but if you called it a cultural study tour, I expect your Governors or Committee, or whatever it is, would give it their blessing. Why not try it? Just give that great mind of yours to it, Wilfrid. I seem to remember you weren't the man to let difficulties stop you, once you'd set yourself on a project.

Not the man to let difficulties stop him!

His mind went back to Major Francis. A big, blond, rather silent man, who wore rimless glasses with an air of serious purpose that camouflaged a very kind heart. A widower; shy to start with, but thawing remarkably once you got to know him. He had been billeted on the Wetheralls for most of two years at Leamington Spa, and a sad coincidence of loss had drawn them very close.

First there had been the time—he didn't like to think of it even now—when Alice's first child had been stillborn. No reason in particular, that the doctor could see. Just the strain of life as it was being lived at that time. A microscopic war casualty. (That was what made this one so doubly important. All *must* go well this time.)

Then there had been that bleak Monday when the news had come about the Major's only son who had been doing his pilot training at Fort Shilo. Exactly what Mrs. Wetherall had found to say to Major Francis, her husband had never discovered. He had kept out of the way, pleading overwork. It was an excuse that really had some validity in that mad time, when horizons were short and everyone was doing the work of three, and seemed to thrive on it. Perhaps everything that had happened in England since had been a reaction from that period.

He fidgeted round for a bit; wondered if he ought to do something about putting the supper on, but decided that anything he did would certainly be wrong. He picked up the paper and tried to finish the

crossword puzzle; thought a little about his own problems, and came to the conclusion that, since he had already made up his mind, it was a waste of time thinking any more about them.

When his wife came home she found him asleep.

Next morning Mr. Wetherall caught the 10 o'clock express from Waterloo.

He started out, as if to go to school, by catching his usual bus, jumped off at the traffic lights before the school stop, and walked along Albany Road until he was quite certain that no one was taking any interest in him whatever. Then he picked up a cruising taxi and drove the short remaining distance to the station.

At 12.30 his train slid into a sleepy West-Country station, and Mr. Wetherall climbed out. A quarter of an hour later, he was on the doorstep of the School of Art.

His old friend Mr. Ap-Lloyd, the Principal, appeared and grasped Mr. Wetherall's hand. He was a small Welshman with white hair.

"Wilfrid. I'm so glad."

"How's Peter getting along?"

"Splendid. Quite splendid. That was a really good turn you did for us. Peter Crowdy's an extremely promising draughtsman. Really, he's more than promising. He's got a very mature technique and the sort of eye for line that you can be born with, but you can never learn. He's in the studio. Go along, you know the way."

It took a moment for Mr. Wetherall to recognize Peter Crowdy. If the interval had been ten months instead of ten days he could not have been more surprised.

"That's a lovely beard, Peter."

Crowdy smiled. "It's part of the uniform," he said. "All artists have beards when they're young. Glad to see you, Mr. Wetherall."

"You won't be when I've done with you." Mr. Wetherall backed the words with a smile, but he saw the boy stiffen up.

"Come on," he said. "Sit down and get it over. Just imagine you're having a tooth out. Three hard pulls and away it comes."

"O.K.," said Crowdy. They both sat down on the window-seat, under the big window, and looked at each other.

"If I tell you," said Crowdy, "does it mean I shan't have to tell it all over again—to the police?"

Mr. Wetherall nearly said yes, but the northern light was too uncompromising.

"You know I can't bind the police," he said. "But I promise you I'll do what I can. And I'll tell you one thing. It won't just be the local coppers. I'm going right up to the top with it, if I have to. If what I tell them helps them to get their hands on the people they want, I don't imagine they'll be too fussy about the early stages, especially now that—"

"Now that dad's dead."

"Yes."

"It wasn't an accident, was it? He was killed?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. "I don't think there's any doubt about that at all."

"All right," said Crowdy. "Here it is. You know dad had a job in the forwarding office at Crossways Goods Station? I don't know if you know how a forwarding office works. Say you're sending a sewing-machine from the country to somewhere in London. You hand it over to the Railway at your local station. It gets entered up in a book, and you get a receipt. Your station sends it to Crossways, with particulars. One of the forwarding clerks at Crossways labels it the correct way—'Carriage Forward' or 'Cash on Delivery' or 'Carriage Paid' or whatever it might be—and arranges for it to be put on the proper lorry or van or whatever it may be going out to that district. O.K.?"

Mr. Wetherall nodded. It seemed reasonably clear.

"Well, that's how it worked."

"How what worked?"

"The racket. There was dad and three or four others in it. More, by the end. It got a bit out of hand. It was too easy. They had labels ready with their own addresses on them—or, anyway, addresses they could use. They just slapped these on promising-looking parcels, with a 'Carriage Paid' label, and the carriers delivered them. The carriers weren't in it, see? They just followed the labels and notices. Easy as falling off a log."

"What sort of stuff?"

"Cases of spirits, tea, wireless sets, cartons of cigarettes, sewing-machines, lawn-mowers. Anything that takes your fancy."

"I see." Mr. Wetherall pondered for a moment. "I suppose the person who had dispatched the goods sooner or later produced his receipt and made a fuss, and the Railway had to pay up?"

"That's right." Crowdy giggled. "Do you know, one chap who was in on it—he sold typewriters—used to tip us off whenever he sent one by rail to a customer and we simply labelled it back to him? Dad said he got to recognize one machine. It came round six times."

"Hmph," said Mr. Wetherall. "What did they do with all the stuff?"

"That was the crazy part," said Peter. "A lot of it they didn't really want at all. It was stealing for the sake of stealing. I know one man had four wireless sets buried in his allotment. Of course, if it was food or drink or smokes, they sold them—sold them to—sold them to a local café."

"I know all about Jock's Pull-In," said Mr. Wetherall. "How did you come into this?"

"It was on account of the labels. The only way the Railways had of checking at Crossways was the number of forwarding labels—'out' labels they called them—that each clerk used. They had to tally with his record-book—like a bus conductor and his tickets. Of course, they couldn't enter the phoney deliveries, and if they'd used official labels on them they'd have been short in their tally at

the end of the day. So Dad got me to make up some for them. I drew the originals, and one of the gang had them photographed on special paper."

Light dawned. "That's what you were doing that evening when I called at your house and your father threw me out?"

"That's right. You didn't half give us a fright!"

"Hmph," said Mr. Wetherall again. It was clearly the moment when he ought to tackle the moral side of the business. He felt at a loss. Perhaps robbing a railway didn't seem as immoral as robbing a person. It had cost Peter's father his life, and Peter was talking about it as if it were some sort of game.

Mr. Wetherall gave it up. "Behave yourself," he said. "I've got to get back to London. I've got a job to do."

He did quite a lot of thinking in the slow train which took him back.

There was a chemical simplicity about the way things were falling out. He was the catalyst. He provoked reactions in others. Luigi, Sergeant Donovan, Mr. Crowdy and Peter; even Mr. Bertram the lawyer. All had spun for him their single strands. All had their parts preordained in the matter. All had played them for his benefit.

Now he could see the pattern. Not all of it, but enough to see that it was a pattern; enough to be certain that something ought to be done about it; enough to realize that it was too big for him alone.

He needed professional help, and he thought he knew where he could look for it.

As the train crawled towards London he outlined his plans to himself.

It was not until after tea on the following day that he could get away from the school. He reached the *Kite* office at about half past five, when the great machine was beginning to hum into first gear. Once there, it took him another half-hour to get as far as Todd.

"I'm sorry," said Todd, "but I've been dealing with a lunatic. You get lots of lunatics in newspaper offices. When this particular one gets past the desk sergeant I have to deal with him. Now, what's on your mind?"

Mr. Wetherall explained. It took time, as always in that office, but Todd was soon interested enough to disconnect the telephone and lock the door.

"I see," he said at the end. "That's quite a comprehensive picture, isn't it? There's not a great deal of what you might call concrete proof, but add it to what I've got, and it sounds like sense. The thing is, what are we going to do about it?"

"I thought I might have a word with that editor of yours," he said, "and see if he'd get the paper on to it."

"You thought what?" said Todd faintly.

"I thought—"

"Yes. I heard. And how did you imagine, just as a matter of interest, that you were going to set about it? If a Cabinet Minister wants to see him he gives him a week's notice and hopes for the best."

" *You* must be able to see him ? "

" If he wants to see me—and if I can persuade him that I have got anything to say worth his listening to—and if I'm prepared to risk getting the sack if I was wrong about it."

"Go along," said Mr. Wetherall. "It can't be as difficult as all that."

" I can see you've never worked in a newspaper office," said Todd, giving him a dirty look. " All right. I'll do it. If you hear a dull crash it'll be me bouncing."

He went reluctantly out, and Mr. Wetherall was left to his own thoughts.

About half an hour later the house telephone rang. Mr. Wetherall removed the receiver, gingerly.

" You still there ? " said Todd's voice. " Well, hold on a bit longer. I'm not there yet, but I'm advancing."

Half an hour later the telephone rang again.

" Go and get yourself something to eat," said Todd. " You remember that café I took you to ? Go there."

Mr. Wetherall had been sitting at the *Kite* table for nearly two hours before Todd turned up. He had had some sort of meal and had then started ordering and drinking cups of coffee.

" He won't do it," said Todd.

" No help at all ? " Mr. Wetherall fought down a sinking feeling.

" He's sympathetic. In fact, he was very nice about it. But there was no shifting him. You can't argue with the old man any more than you can argue with Table Mountain. It's a question of watching his moods and getting under cover when it rains. What he said was, he isn't going to start a crusade. It isn't his line of country. It's pure crime—better dealt with by the police. If there's some point the police can't get at, for legal, or social, or some other phoney reason, then a newspaper can sometimes go for it and clear it up. He says, as far as he can see, there's nothing here the police can't deal with."

" I see," said Mr. Wetherall.

" Cheer up," said Todd. " We're still with you. Something may happen yet, you never know. If you get knocked off you'll get a wonderful obituary. I'll have sausages, Joe, sausages and bacon. Two rashers. Don't talk to me about rationing. We all know where your stuff comes from."

Joe grinned and withdrew. Mr. Wetherall finished his fourth cup of coffee thoughtfully.

SCOTLAND YARD

The fine autumn weather had broken, and Mr. Wetherall approached Scotland Yard from the river entrance in a downpour of rain. Apart from the impassive policemen at the gate, the rain cascading sleekly off their black capes, there was nothing to distinguish the building on the embankment from any other office block.

Mr. Wetherall wiped his feet on the mat, furled his umbrella, and handed himself over to a hall porter.

"You have an appointment?"

Yes. Yes. He had an appointment with Chief Superintendent Hazlerigg.

He followed a young policemen. They walked along three or four miles of corridor, up some steps, over a sort of enclosed bridge, and down some steps, and stopped at a dark brown door with a number on it.

The room was no different from any other Government office except that it was neater than most; almost severe in its rectitude.

The man who got up from behind the desk was unmistakably a policeman, although he could also have been a farmer. He was thickset and had a red-brown face and grizzled hair. He had the tolerant look of one who has spent a lifetime coping with the unpredictable climate of England. Perhaps the only remarkable thing about him was his eyes. They were that shallow grey which, like the grey of the North Sea, can change without warning from friendliness to bleak wrath.

At the moment they looked friendly.

"Sit down, Mr. Wetherall." He indicated the easy chair opposite the desk. "I'm so glad you've come. I heard about you from Huth, and I hoped I should be seeing you sooner or later. He tells me you're the head of South Borough High School. And you were at Battersea? I expect you remember Cusins."

"Franky Cusins, or his brother Lefty? I remember both. The finest boxers we ever had. Franky had a foot shot off in Sicily. Were you—?"

"No, no," said the Inspector. "All the schooling I had I picked up at a village school in Norfolk. Most of the old village schools are going now. More's the pity. Still, I suppose you don't agree with that. You've got one of the biggest in London. You're probably in favour of big schools?"

"In reason."

"Centralization. That's the cry nowadays. Centralize everything."

"Even crime," suggested Mr. Wetherall, just to see what would happen.

"Even crime," agreed Hazlerigg impassively. "You know that's one of my jobs. Organised crime."

"Superintendent Huth said something about it."

"It's not a non-stop job, you understand. I get an outing from time to time. But by and large, you can take it I hold a watching brief on the black market. A lot of these offences aren't really police matters at all, Mr. Wetherall. But very often it comes to crime."

Hazlerigg tilted his chair confidentially forward. "You know, there's something about black market that always brings crime in sooner or later. Maybe it's a couple of smart barrow boys—one thinks the other is trespassing on his pitch, and blood gets spilt. Nothing much in that. Or else it's something worse, like blackmail."

"Blackmail?" said Mr. Wetherall sharply.

"Why certainly. There's a lot of scope for that. A restaurant

proprietor, you see, gets short of a line, and some smart Alec fixes it for him on the side. All right. Next time the restaurant owner is offered the same commodity, and he doesn't happen to want it. Perhaps there's no demand for it—or he can get plenty of it honestly. Then the supplier says, 'You can take it or else—'"

"Or else what?"

"It depends if the buyer has got money or not. If he's well off he'll be forced to buy—at a bigger price this time. If he's a little man, they just run him out of business, as an example to the others."

"They run him out of business, all right," agreed Mr. Wetherall. He was thinking back to that evening at Luigi's when it had all started. Less than three weeks ago, actually. It seemed a good deal longer.

"Violence, blackmail," went on Hazlerigg. "But those are just side crimes. The root crime is plain stealing. That's what it always boils down to. An increase in all forms of stealing. It works both ways. First, a man finds a profitable line of scarce goods. I say 'finds'. Maybe the first time he did get his hands on them more or less honestly. He sells them on the black market and makes a thundering profit. Naturally, he wants to do it again. Only this time he just can't get hold of the stuff. Sooner or later he'll be buying in the stolen goods market. Stealing for himself, or buying off a receiver, it comes to the same thing in the end.

"Or just look at it from the other side. You're not a trader at all. You're a railwayman or a post-office worker or a lorry-driver. You're not overpaid, and goods—valuable goods, some of them—pass through your hands every day. You could steal them—easily—just like that—if you wanted to. What stops you?"

He seemed to be waiting for an answer, so Mr. Wetherall gave his mind to it.

"Discounting," he said, "the surprising decency and honesty of the ordinary man, I should think the chief preventive is the fear of being found out."

"All right. But say that you're pretty certain you won't be found out. Your experience has shown you that the ordinary checks aren't going to catch you—or perhaps you know a way round them."

"Well, in that case I take it the next consideration is, what chance have I got of making a quick safe profit."

"Right. That's where the organization comes in."

"And that, I take it," said Mr. Wetherall slowly, "is where you come in?"

"Yes," said Hazlerigg. "That's my job."

He got up, unlocked a filing cabinet, and took out a set of cardboard folders.

"And have they got organized?"

Hazlerigg opened the first folder. "They're organized, all right," he said, "especially at the selling end. In confidence, they're a damned sight too well organized. I had three of the biggest caterers in the country in here yesterday. They're wholesalers and they supply most of the restaurants in the metropolitan area. They're absolutely above-board themselves, of course. But they say they can't compete.

They're losing customers every day. All right. They're in it for money. We won't waste any tears over them. But that's only one end—"

He opened a second folder. "It's the other end that's terrifying. First of all, if I told you how high the railway losses by theft had jumped last year—which I'm not allowed to—I doubt if you'd believe the figure. But that's not the worst of it. I just want to show you a cutting. There's nothing confidential about it. It appeared the other day in a well-known newspaper and I've no doubt it's absolutely accurate."

"Strike Threat," the cutting was headed. Mr. Wetherall read on. "Goods Depot men threatened to strike at midnight last night in protest against the employment of two men who, they say, gave information to the police and helped them to check pilfering. The strike threat was called off after a meeting lasting more than two hours pending a full station meeting of all the men this morning when further decisions might be reached. The depot is one of London's chief points for food distribution."

"Do you like it?" asked Hazlerigg. "Does it amuse you? Nearly a thousand men to go on strike because two of them were honest and had the guts to demonstrate it. That particular strike didn't come off. As a nation I don't think we're quite corrupted yet. But give it a year or two, and if this sort of thing goes on, we might just as well put the boards up—Final Performance. The Old Firm Going into Liquidation."

He shut the folder, straightened up, and said with a smile that went straight to Mr. Wetherall's heart, "That's why we are not ashamed to ask for any help we can get."

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Wetherall simply.

He had told the story so many times that he was becoming good at it. Having a sympathetic listener made a difference.

Hazlerigg did not interrupt him at all, but when Sergeant Donovan's name cropped up, he got out an entirely new and rather bulky folder. He may also have pressed a buzzer, because as Mr. Wetherall finished speaking a sergeant put his head round the door, and Hazlerigg said, "Would you get hold of Superintendent Huth, please? He's somewhere about."

The sergeant withdrew.

"I can't say how grateful I am," he went on, "that you should have come forward to tell us this. What you say fills in some big gaps. That item about Crossways, in particular. Now, if you'll bear with me for a couple of minutes, I propose to put you further into the picture. It's not entirely unselfish. As I said, I want your help, and if you're going to help, you'll have to hear things which mustn't go outside these walls.

"We'll start at the bottom. There's a lot of pilfering going on. It's unco-ordinated at that level. It always has been, and, so far as I can see, it always will be. There's no great master-brain organizing gangs of looters. It's haphazard. People like Crowdy think of a

bright idea about diverting railway goods. Things are stolen in transit from lorries. Smart types hang around American Air Force stations and get mess waiters to sell them duty-free canteen stock. Men go round the countryside in motor vans lifting chickens and turkeys and slaughtering cattle. The other day they even lifted a dozen ducks from the lake in Hyde Park. There's another crowd that specializes in forging used coupons, which go to dishonest retailers who sell them rationed food in bulk and use the false coupons to square their accounts with the food office.

"All well-known, well-tried methods, and if they receive no particular encouragement, we can keep them in bounds. In fact, at the beginning of last year I almost thought we were in for a spell of peace and righteousness. The graphs were going down. Now they're in reverse. And simply because someone has had the wit and the knowledge to organize the distribution end."

Mr. Wetherall thought about what Todd had told him. It looked as if the fancies of Fleet Street and the facts of Whitehall were marching in step for once.

"That's the outline," said Hazlerigg. "They have established receiving centres in different places round London. There are two or three cafés with lorry parks of the 'Jock's Pull-In' type. Those concentrate on food. You know how they work.

"Then there's a certain wholesale wine and spirits store in North London that we've had our eye on recently. The principle seems to be the same. You go in with what looks like a lot of 'returned empties', money passes across the counter, and you come out carrying two or three wrapped bottles. Nothing wrong with that? Except that the 'empties' were really full bottles of Scotch or rye, and the bottles you came out with were empties or dummies—and you received money instead of paying it. Damned difficult to spot. We only got wind of it when one of our men happened to get curious about the number of vans and cars with similar registration plates that stopped near this particular shop. Then there are the stolen cigarettes."

"I suppose they run a cigarette shop for those?"

"Too risky," said Hazlerigg. "Think again. Too many people in and out of a tobacconist and no excuse for carrying parcels in and coming out without them. Any ideas? Well, the biggest receiver of stolen cigarettes that we know about is a dry-cleaning establishment in Clerkenwell. So much for the receiving end. Each of these receivers is cleared about once a week. The clearing is done by whichever gang happens to be currently in favour."

"That's where Red Whittaker and his friends come into it?"

"Yes. It seems to have been Whittaker for some months now. His lot'll go on doing it until they blot their copy-books by getting too obvious or too greedy—or by getting into trouble with the police on some other count. Speaking for ourselves we'd prefer to keep it at Whittaker for the moment—because then we do know where we are."

"Which was no doubt why you were so unenthusiastic about my charges against Whittaker the other day?"

" Partly," said Hazlerigg cautiously. " Partly. There were other considerations as well."

" All right," said Mr. Wetherall. " Let it go. Where do they take the stuff next ? "

" That's one of the things we would give a good deal to find out. And it's not going to be easy, without giving our hand away. These boys are expert drivers who know London backwards. They don't mind how much trouble they take to make sure they're not being followed. One time, when they got the idea we were following one of their vans, they abandoned it, with all its contents, in a cul-de-sac near King's Cross. We didn't touch it. We just put men into a nearby building to watch it."

Hazlerigg grinned. " After a month," he said, " we gave them best on that one. However, I expect we shall spot the central dump sooner or later—unless they keep moving it round, which is a possibility. When we get there we shall find the answer to one or two further little problems. Among other things I expect to find some sort of printing-press."

" Coupons ? "

" No. Too risky. It's labels. A lot of the stuff they steal is well-known, proprietary stuff. They find it pays to relabel it. Partly to make it difficult for their customers to check back on them, but chiefly, I believe, because some of the restaurants they sell to are of the ' near-honest ' variety. If you present them with patently stolen goods they'll jib—but offer them a case of tinned ham with an unknown label, and they'll kid themselves that it's all right and accept it."

" There's a suggestion of psychology at the back of that," said Mr. Wetherall.

" I don't know about psychology. But I'd say that there was someone in the background with a detailed knowledge of how the food industry works."

" All right. What next ? "

" The next step, I have no doubt, is Annie. When the boys have sold off the stuff to the hundred and one restaurants and cafés on their visiting-list they pack up the cash into sizable bundles and pass it over the counter in the private bar of the Double Four in Lauderdale Street."

" And she passes it on to Holloman ? "

" I think that's right."

Mr. Wetherall felt a quickening of excitement, tempered by the thought that he might have delivered Sammy over to the enemy. " Do you think, then, that Holloman is the man who runs the whole show ? "

" Could be," said Hazlerigg. " Could be. And yet, I don't know. It's early to say. There's one thing we've got to prove—and I mean prove in such a way that it'll stand up in a Court of Law—and that's the connection between Whittaker and Holloman."

" Or Annie and Holloman."

" Yes. That could work either way. Annie could be just a post

office, and Whittaker could take his orders from Holloman. Or Holloman could send the orders to Annie, who passes them on to Whittaker. My only objection to that is that I can't see a tough boy like Whittaker taking his orders from a woman."

"You haven't met Annie," said Mr. Wetherall. "I've met her, and I can believe that part easily. But I don't see how you'll ever prove it. If Whittaker hands the money to Annie, and Annie posts it to Holloman, and Holloman gets rid of it somehow to someone else—"

"It's not easy," agreed Hazlerigg, "but it's not as difficult as all that. We're almost ready to pick this particular bunch of wildflowers. And when a big show like this begins to break up, it always breaks up from the bottom. You find a flaw, slip in a wedge and," Hazlerigg held up one thick hand, "you wham it with a hammer, and the thing falls apart—if you see what I mean."

"Roughly."

"You've got to find the flaw, of course, and pick the right wedge."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall cautiously.

"In this case, you've suggested the answer yourself. Or rather, if what you tell me is right, Sergeant Donovan seems to have it all worked out for us. A minor character in Whittaker's lot known as Guardsman is the flaw. The wedge is Sergeant Donovan himself. And we—" Hazlerigg heaved himself up to his feet—"are the hammer. Come in, Huth. How are you keeping? You know Mr. Wetherall."

Superintendent Huth grinned like a little white alley cat and shook Mr. Wetherall's hand.

"I'd just got as far as Sergeant Donovan," said Hazlerigg.

Superintendent Huth said, "Yes."

"We are in rather an unhappy position there. He's not been one of our successes. I'm not saying that's all his fault. There have been mistakes on both sides." Mr. Wetherall intercepted the look that passed between Hazlerigg and Huth and, having met Inspector Clark, understood it perfectly. "However, we won't go into that just now. It's been a queer set-up from the start. You know Sergeant Donovan was used by us as an undercover worker. That's perfectly true. He brought in a lot of information. The stopping of one nice little racket in petrol can be chalked up to his credit. Then, we know he started taking money. He handed over money to us, too, though not, I can't help feeling, absolutely all of it. Then, the information he produced started to get less valuable.

"Well, there were two ways of looking at that. There was the nasty way—which we didn't want to think. Or the reason could have been that his game was becoming known, so he wasn't able to find out much. So we took him off the job. If we'd been sensible we'd have moved him out of the district altogether—"

"Would this have been before or after his wife got killed?"

"A few weeks before—" Hazlerigg looked again at Huth, who said softly, "It was never proved that the two things had any connection."

"It was pretty obvious, I should have thought," said Mr. Wetherall sharply; and when both men looked up at him, he felt uncomfortable.

"Well, we'll not argue about it," said Hazlerigg. "But either way, it doesn't make things any easier now we want to use the Sergeant."

"Use?"

Again he caught Hazlerigg looking at Superintendent Huth and realized that a proposition was going to be put up to him, and that it was of a kind which they were afraid he would not approve.

"I won't pretend this is a plan we're keen on," said Hazlerigg, "but we just can't think of a better. Here's Sergeant Donovan, more or less treed at home. I mean, we could get hold of him easily enough by sending a police car, but that's not the point. He may be more useful where he is. Then there's the Whittaker boys waiting for him to come out of baulk so that they can hit him. Sooner or later he'll come out. We'd like him to do it in our time, not theirs. That's all there is to it."

Light began to dawn.

"You'd like me to fetch him out?"

"This is what we had in mind. We thought you might slip in the back way, as before. It would be natural enough for you to go and see him. Tell him about going to see Peter Crowdy, and that Peter has given you a lot of information. No harm in telling him about the parcel-labelling racket—that should appeal to him. But drop in the extra item that you think you may have discovered the address of the central sorting-house. Something Peter heard his father say before he was killed. You can wrap it up any way you like.

"The address we want you to give him—" Hazlerigg scribbled on a bit of paper, "is an old factory on a site off the North Circular Road. It's a factory that's got certain features about it that have made it useful to us before. All you've got to do is to get it into his head that this might be the place. Suggest that you'd like to go with him and have a look at it. Then tip us off when he starts out. We'll do the the rest."

Mr. Wetherall picked up the piece of paper and sat for a few moments, turning it over in his fingers. "Yes," he said, at last. "Yes, and no. I'm agreeable to putting myself in your hands. You're not asking me to do a great deal, and if you think this is the best way of bringing things to a head, then I'll do it. But I'm not going to do it blind. I must know what the idea is."

"All right," said Hazlerigg. "You've got the right to know. As soon as Sergeant Donovan moves out, one of our contacts will tip off Whittaker and tell them where he's going. Whittaker's boys will either follow him, or get there first. When they catch him they'll beat him up. Then we shall intervene—but not too soon—and hold them all for assault. Donovan's still technically a member of this force—he's only under suspension. The charge will be assaulting a police officer with intent to kill. That's a damned heavy charge. Then we shall work on Guardsman and promise him consideration if he'll give us all we want on Whittaker."

"Which he will," said Huth, beaming quietly. "In five minutes."

"When we've got Whittaker fixed, we'll offer *him* consideration if he leads up to Holloman."

"I see," said Mr. Wetherall.

"You insisted on knowing, or I wouldn't have told you. If you think it's rough on Sergeant Donovan—"

"I'm not worried about Sergeant Donovan at all," said Mr. Wetherall. "In fact, it's practically the plan he suggested himself—"

He fell silent again. He was thinking of a lot of things rather confusedly. He thought of Luigi and old Mr. Crowdy, of Peter Crowdy and quite a lot of other boys he had taught. But chiefly he thought of Peggy.

"All right," he said. "I'll get in to see Sergeant Donovan after tea on Friday. You can expect to hear from me some time in the evening."

SAMMY INVESTIGATES

Friday was a short day at Hollomans. The girls knocked off at four o'clock, and by half past four Sammy was sitting in the dining-room with a cup of tea, thinking about things.

On the one hand, he had just discovered that he had lost the boxing medal which he always carried as a lucky charm in his waistcoat-pocket. On the other hand, his wages, two rather used-looking pound notes, were safe in his wallet; and by twelve o'clock next day he would be free for the weekend. On balance, it seemed all right.

He finished his tea and turned over the pages of a magazine. It was one that the blonde girl had left behind, and it was, so far as Sammy could see, devoted entirely to Love. There was a picture on the front of a man with a dark moustache pushing a lady into a cupboard (Beasts of Belgravia). No murder and no football. Sammy abandoned the paper and concentrated on kicking the chair-leg and whistling.

Presently Mr. Holloman put his head round the door.

"I'm going out," he said. He seemed preoccupied. "I'll be back by six. Don't go away. There may be a telephone call. You can take a message."

"Right char," said Sammy.

The front door slammed. He turned to the evening paper. Elephants at home against Manchester United. That was going to be a game. Two unbeaten sides. Oh boy!

It was ten minutes before the significance of Mr. Holloman's parting remarks dawned on him.

There was only one telephone in the house and it was in the office.

Feeling curiously weak about the knees he got to his feet and went out into the hall. The office door was not only unlocked, it was open.

He stopped to think. He could sneak in now and search around quickly. Or, better, he could go in openly, turn all the lights on, and pretend to be waiting for that telephone call. If he left the office door open he would hear Mr. Holloman's return in plenty of time to clear up any mess he might make whilst searching. The office window

looked out on the side garden. It was not directly visible from the front path.

"Can't lose," said Sammy to himself. "What a turn-up for the book!"

He marched in briskly, switched the lights on, and looked round him.

There was plenty of scope for a search. There was a filing cabinet. There were two cupboards, both, as it turned out, unlocked and both full of papers. And there was the desk itself, which had half a dozen drawers down each side and a lot more small ones inside the top.

"Take a fortnight to look through this lot." He picked out a sheaf of papers from the filing cabinet. They all seemed to be connected with Mr. Holloman's patent medicines. Instinct told him that he was on the wrong track.

He came back to the desk and sat down. The roll-top was open. It looked somehow more personal than the cupboard. He opened one of the small drawers at random. It was full of bank statements and cheque stubs. He noted the name and branch of the bank, and tried another drawer. This one contained a hip-flask of brandy and three packets of aspirin tablets. The next drawer was a very small one. It was set in the foot of the pillar, and he would not have spotted it, if it had not happened to be standing open a fraction.

It was not exactly a secret drawer. Rather, one that had been constructed so as not to catch the eye.

In it lay a bright ring of keys. Two were small keys that might have fitted a drawer or cabinet, and the third was, quite obviously, a safe-key.

Sammy took the ring out, and twirled it thoughtfully round his finger whilst his eyes roved. He was looking for the safe. By now he had stopped straining nervously for approaching footsteps. The fever of the chase was on him.

Unless, he concluded, it was hidden behind some panel or picture on the wall—and it didn't seem quite that sort of house—the only possible place was the brown wooden cupboard built into the corner of the room beside the desk. The door was locked, but he knelt down to it and found that one of the small keys fitted. And there was a safe inside the cupboard.

He didn't know a lot about safes, and was confused at first by the fact that there were two keyholes, at an angle to each other, but he soon got the hang of it, snapped back the lock, twisted the handle, and pulled open the door.

There were more papers in the safe; but what caught his eye was the big drawer at the back. The second small key fitted.

Inside the drawer was more money than he had seen before in his life. A few fivers, but mostly ten-shilling notes and pound notes in bundles, secured by rubber bands and stacked on top of each other. He noticed that most of the notes had a well-used look, as if they had been through several pockets and tills since they had left the bank.

At that moment, and out of the corner of his eye, he noticed something else.

It was on the carpet, to the left of him and behind him.

It was a well-polished shoe.

He looked up and found Mr. Holloman standing over him.

"When I invited you," said Mr. Holloman softly, "to take an interest in the business, you will appreciate that I did not mean quite such a personal interest."

"No—I mean, yes," said Sammy.

He had been in one or two bits of trouble in his short life, but nothing quite so dangerous as this. Instinct told him to get out into the open part of the room, but he was caught between the end of the desk and the side wall. He got up off his knees and turned round, but there was no room for manoeuvre.

"What exactly are you doing?"

"I was waiting for a telephone call, like you said."

"And you thought, perhaps, that I kept the telephone in the safe?"

"No—well—as a matter of fact, I saw the keys."

"You must have good eyes," said Mr. Holloman blandly, "considering the drawer was shut."

"Well—I opened the drawer to look for a pencil, and I saw the keys."

"There is a certain fascination in hearing you improve your story as you go along. Is this yours?"

He shot out his hand and Sammy saw his boxing medal.

"Yes," he said. "I lost it."

He reached out to take it back, but Mr. Holloman tipped it neatly into his own waistcoat-pocket. All his movements were strong and precise, like those of a conjurer.

"I thought it might be yours. You left it outside this door some nights ago. Also some grubby little finger-prints on the edge of the fan-light. What were you doing? Trying to see what there was to steal?"

"I never—"

"What were you doing?"

Sammy remained silent.

"I see," said Mr. Holloman. "Well, I hope you do better at the Police Court."

"I never took nothing."

"No?" The hand snaked forward, went inside Sammy's jacket, and came out holding a wad of notes.

Sammy stared.

"I never put those there," he said at last. "You're trying to frame me."

"A thief."

"I never—"

Mr. Holloman took another step forward and grasped Sammy by the lapels of his jacket. His hands gripped the coat and the shirt and the vest underneath. He shook the boy gently.

"A little thief."

"Let me alone. Take your hands off me."

"A dirty, common little sneak-thief."

The shaking increased in violence. Sammy put his hands up and tried to push Mr. Holloman's arms away. He might as well have tried to shift a pair of steel connecting-rods. He suddenly realized how strong Mr. Holloman was.

A little wave of panic rose and subsided.

"Let me go."

Mr. Holloman stopped shaking him and appeared to consider the request. "And why should I let you go?" he said.

He was so close that Sammy could smell him; a wild-dog smell, of sweat and power and beastliness.

"Get the police, then. Go on, get them!"

"Why should we trouble about the police? I've got a much better idea. I come into the room—" Mr. Holloman marked each sentence with a fierce little jerk—"I find you robbing my safe. I try to lay hold of you. Ah, you dodge away. You jump for the door. But you trip up, and you hit your head on the corner of the desk. Hard—very hard—"

He was getting himself into position with the nice judgment of a man felling an awkward tree.

Sammy opened his mouth to shout. His throat was dry, because he knew now that Mr. Holloman meant to kill him.

In that tiny moment of silence they both heard the click of the front-door latch, and footsteps in the passage.

With a swift, pouncing movement Mr. Holloman threw himself behind the desk, dragging Sammy with him. As he dropped into the chair, Sammy was practically sitting on his knee.

The footsteps had halted. The office door opened cautiously, and Mrs. Cameroni looked in.

"There now," she said, "I thought I saw a light."

"What do you want?" said Mr. Holloman.

"Help!" said Sammy.

"Could have been burglars," said Mrs. Cameroni.

"Let me go!" shouted Sammy. "Leave me alone! Fetch the police!"

"There's a lot of it goes on. I don't know that you can blame the police. It's the films."

Both of Sammy's wrists were locked excruciatingly behind his back; and one of his legs was pinned to the desk by Mr. Holloman's knee. His other leg was free, and he stamped on Mr. Holloman's foot.

Mr. Holloman grinned crookedly and said something between his teeth.

Mrs. Cameroni's button eyes had been swivelling busily round the room.

"Look at all that money," she said. "Lying about. It's a temptation."

"Help!" roared Sammy. "Help, help, help, *help*!"

"You ought to keep it in the bank or the Post Office Savings."

"All right," said Mr. Holloman. "You can get along now." He jerked his head towards the door.

"I come back to see if you was short of tea."

"Fetch the police!" screamed Sammy. He got one arm free for a moment and knocked a desk calendar flying. But Mrs. Cameroni had at last realized that she was not wanted. She was already making for the door.

When she got there she paused for a moment, looked back, said something that sounded like "young blood", and went out carefully, shutting the door behind her.

They listened to her steps shuffling off down the passage towards the kitchen quarters, and heard another door shut.

Sammy thought: "She's still in the house. She hasn't gone away altogether. She's still here." And again, "She's seen me and Mr. Holloman together. She's seen I'm alive. He's not going to be able to do—what he said he was. He'll have to be more careful now."

Some such thought seemed to have occurred to Mr. Holloman. He was sitting, holding both of Sammy's wrists easily now, in one big hand. The boy's arms were twisted up behind him to such an angle that it seemed improbable that they could go any further without something snapping.

Mr. Holloman used his free hand to restore some order to the desk and his person. He seemed to be thinking.

"You let me go," said Sammy.

"Keep quiet."

"Let me go!"

Mr. Holloman exerted a slight upward pressure. The tears stood out in Sammy's eyes.

"Any more out of you," said Mr. Holloman, "and I'll break both your arms, and glad to do it."

Sammy opened his mouth, then decided to shut it again. It was a good moment for saying nothing. That left the next move to Mr. Holloman.

They could still hear the sounds of Mrs. Cameroni banging round in the kitchen.

At last Mr. Holloman seemed to make up his mind. He moved off towards the door. Sammy moved with him. Any variation in the position of his arms was torture.

They marched along to the end of the passage, and Mr. Holloman opened a door.

Sammy knew what it was. He had been in and out of it before. It was the store cupboard where the ingredients for Mr. Holloman's medicines and ointments were kept. It was a large cupboard—almost a small room—with a great number of shelves up and down either side. It had a stone floor and no window. The door was a thick one. It might almost have been designed as a lock-up.

Mr. Holloman pushed the boy in and then let go of him. Suddenly

released, he stumbled forward, and finished up half squatting, half kneeling, against the far wall.

Mr. Holloman stood in the doorway and looked down at him thoughtfully.

When he spoke there was a detached coldness in his voice that warned Sammy that he had made up his mind to do something evil.

"If you shout, or make any attempt to attract attention or break out," he said, "I shall tie you up and gag you. I shall tie your arms and feet together in the middle of your back. It's a method invented by the Japanese police."

Sammy said nothing. He was gently flexing his misused arms.

"It won't be comfortable. In fact, it will be very uncomfortable. There was a man once—I had to leave him tied like that for twelve hours. Do you know what happened? We never got his arms or legs straight again. Think of that. Just twelve hours. He was crippled for life."

Still Sammy said nothing.

Mr. Holloman went out, slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock. His footsteps went softly away down the passage.

Todd felt an immediate twinge of uneasiness when Sammy failed to ring him up by six o'clock that Friday evening. It was the first time he had missed doing so.

Moreover, Todd had spent some time that afternoon talking to Mr. Wetherall; and although the fact that they were using a public line had dictated a certain discretion, he had picked up enough to realize that, in Mr. Holloman, they might be trying to cast their net over a very dangerous animal.

He gave it fifteen minutes more, then scribbled a message for his second-in-command, seized his hat and coat, and set off up Fetter Lane.

It was an unpleasant evening, raw and airless at the same time, with low cloud overhead and hardly a stirring of wind. It promised a very dark night, with fog as well, perhaps. He boarded a trolley-bus at the terminus beside Smithfield Market. The evening rush was over and he was bowled quickly northwards, past the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, through the squalid jungle of King's Cross, along the Caledonian Road, past the dark fortress of Pentonville Prison, and back again to the lights of the Holloway Road.

Here he got out.

He found Strudwick Road without difficulty, and seven o'clock was striking as he stopped outside the gate of No. 5. For the first time since he had started out it occurred to him to wonder just what he was going to be. Schoolmaster, salesman, welfare worker, political canvasser, pools tout. In his shabby raincoat, his indeterminate, friendly face under the ruins of a trilby hat, he might have been almost anything.

His experience as a reporter had taught him that it was generally a waste of time to make up any story in advance. Wait and see who opens the door was the best rule.

He advanced cautiously up the path, between the bushes. There was a light in the hall. It shone dimly out through the stained glass of the door. The front windows on either side of the door were dark. He pressed the bell, then stopped, and listened.

There was life somewhere at the back of the house. Someone was moving about. He waited hopefully, but nothing more happened. He put his finger on the bell-push again and kept it there for a full minute.

In the kitchen Mrs. Cameroni had almost finished what she had come to do. She was packing something into the bottom of an old black bag. When the bell first sounded she was actually inside the larder and heard nothing. On the second occasion a faint thrumming did assail her unresponsive ear-drums. The sound was familiar, and she glanced up irritably at the box of tell-tales above the sink.

Someone at the front door now!

First it was one thing, then another. What an evening! She laid her black bag carefully under the dresser and threw a dish-cloth over it. Then she started off down the passage.

From inside the store cupboard Sammy heard her coming. He took a deep breath. Ten minutes before, he fancied he had heard Mr. Holloman go out. He had been moving very quietly, but the front door had a distinctive squeak, and Sammy was pretty certain that he had heard it open and shut.

On the other hand, his experiences that evening had already

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taught him the important truth that, because you hear a door open and shut, it does not necessarily mean that anyone has gone through it.

He had no desire to be tied up in a Japanese bundle, but this might be the last safe chance that he was going to get of attracting attention.

As against that, even if Mr. Holloman *was* out, the person who had just rung the door bell might easily be a friend of Mr. Holloman's, and therefore evilly disposed.

He thought he would compromise.

As Mrs. Cameroni came opposite his door he put his fingers to his lips–and gave one piercing whistle.

Outside in the passage, Mrs. Cameroni scarcely slowed down.

She certainly heard something. A faint but distinct sound, like a kettle starting to boil. Since she knew she was alone in the house, the only conclusion she could arrive at was that the impatient person outside the front door had started whistling. Let him whistle. What did he think she was ? A canary ?

She flounced forward, flung the street door open, and said, " Well ? "

" Good evening, madam," said Todd, raising his hat and switching on the full power of his smile. " I'm so sorry to have bothered you."

Mrs. Cameroni, of course, did not hear a word, but she was sensibly mollified. She had a weakness for young men who smiled that way.

" It's no good," she said, " I can't do anything for you. Barring me, there's no one in the house."

" I was looking for a young friend of mine, Sammy Donovan."

" He's gone up to town. Goes every evening about now. He goes up to his club."

Todd felt baffled.

" Just a boy," he said. " Red hair."

" I expect it's medicine you want," agreed Mrs. Cameroni. " Urgent, too, I suppose."

Again Todd's professional experience came to his rescue. He felt in his pocket, got out an envelope, and wrote in block letters : WHERE IS SAMMY ?

Mrs. Cameroni glanced out of the corner of her eye at what was written, and said, " I heard you right enough the first time. He's gone out."

" Where ? " Todd shaped the word very carefully with his lips.

" Not long ago," said Mrs. Cameroni. " Can't have been gone long. Quarter of an hour, I should say. Can't be more than twenty minutes ago he was in there "—she jerked her head towards the office—" playing with Mr. Holloman."

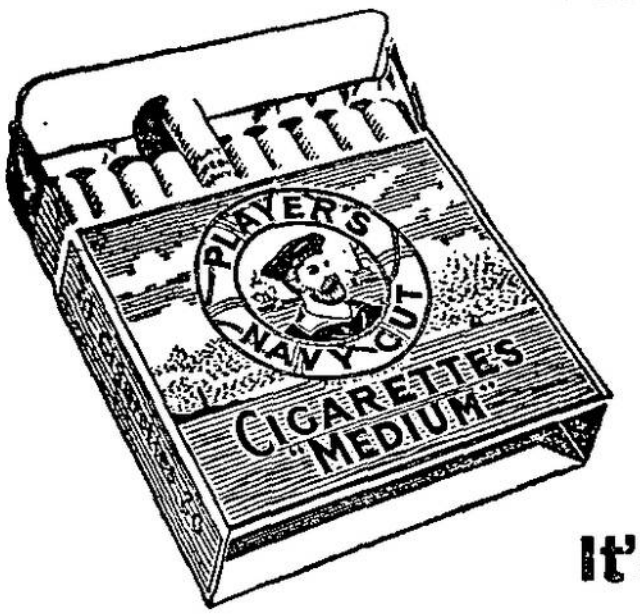
" Playing ? "

" Romping. He was sitting on Mr. Holloman's knee."

" Good gracious ! " It didn't make sense to Todd. There had been nothing kittenish about the Sammy he remembered.

Whatever the pleasure

Player's complete it



Player's Please

It's the tobacco that counts

[NCC 827]

"You don't know where he went. *Where?*"

This was over her head. He took the envelope and wrote it down.

"Nothing to do with me," said Mrs. Cameroni. "I was in the kitchen. Minding my own business."

It was clear that the interview was drawing to a close. Todd seized the paper again and wrote: "If you want help, ring me at Central 96999."

Mrs. Cameroni looked surprised.

"Why should I want help? No one's doing anything to me."

"You're lucky," said Todd pleasantly. "Really I can't think why someone hasn't strangled you a long time ago."

He waved his hand to her. She stood staring after him. His last message seemed to have upset her.

THE FOG

Todd walked quickly down the road. He made for the call-box that he had noticed at the corner and put a call through to Mr. Wetherall. As he heard the bell continuing to ring, he imagined the flat must be empty, but at the last moment the instrument gave a "clunk", and Mrs. Wetherall came on the line. She sounded out of breath.

"I heard the bell as I was coming upstairs," she said. "Who is it? Oh, it's you, Alastair. I didn't recognize your voice."

"It's the fog," said Todd.

"I'm afraid Wilfrid isn't in." She sounded faintly upset. "He telephoned me about an hour ago from the school. He had to go round to see the Donovans. I thought he'd be back by the time I got home."

"The Donovans? Did he happen to say why?"

"No. What's it all about?"

"I wondered if Sammy might have turned up. No one up here seems to know where he is."

"I don't think it was anything to do with Sammy. Something about Sergeant Donovan."

"I'll ring again in an hour," said Todd.

The fog had been getting thicker as he was speaking. When he came out of the box he could no longer see across the road.

Back in the kitchen at No. 5 Strudwick Road, Mrs. Cameroni rescued her black bag from under the dresser. She turned out the light and walked to the front door. She sniffed at the fog, which was not yet quite as thick up at that end of the road, and pulled a scarf over her head and ears. Then she went out, banging the door behind her.

She was halfway down the path when she saw the figure coming along the pavement opposite, passing under the lamp. There was nothing wrong with her eyesight.

With remarkable agility, she hopped off the front path into the shrubbery.

The gate slammed, and Mr. Holloman stalked up the path, passing within a few feet of where she was standing. He seemed to

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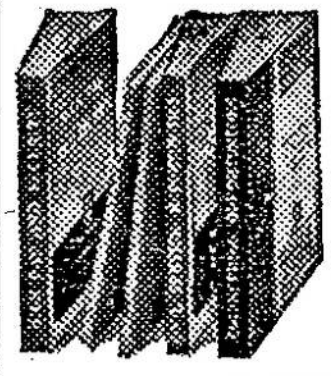

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***The* School of Careers**

be in a hurry. His key clicked in the lock, and the door opened, and shut again.

Mrs. Cameroni came out of the shrubbery and shuffled away, out of the garden and down the road.

It seemed to her an awful lot of trouble for two tins of bacon.

It was Peggy who conducted Mr. Wetherall to Ratcliff Lane that evening. When it came to squeezing through fences and climbing over walls, she seemed even more agile than her brother. Mr. Wetherall did not give his full attention to what he was doing. He was beginning to feel a distaste for what lay ahead. He recognized the necessity for it, but he could not be happy about what he was letting Sergeant Donovan in for. Three weeks ago he might not have minded so much. Three weeks ago he had not been subjected to that particular treatment himself.

"Mind the wire," said Peggy. "They put it up since you came here last. It's meant to stop the cats."

The Donovan kitchen looked somehow warm and homely. Ratcliff Lane was suffering under an electricity failure and Mrs. Donovan had lighted an old, oil-smelling lamp. She had also made some tea, for which Mr. Wetherall was thankful. It was a damp, unpromising night.

Whilst he was drinking it, Mrs. Donovan said, "Show Mr. Wetherall that letter you had from Sammy."

"Seems all right," said Mr. Wetherall, when he had read it. "He was bound to be a bit homesick to start with. Hullo, wherever did you get that?"

He was staring in astonishment at the strip of photographs that had fallen out of the envelope.

"It was in Sammy's letter," said Peggy. "He didn't say anything about it. He must have put them in after he had written it."

"What's up?" said Sergeant Donovan.

"I really think," said Mr. Wetherall slowly, "that we ought to get in touch with Sammy without delay."

"He's coming home lunch-time tomorrow," said Mrs. Donovan.

"There's something up," said Sergeant Donovan. "What's wrong? What is it, Mr. Wetherall?"

"We must find out where Sammy got those photographs. It's a woman called Annie. It's difficult to explain—but she's a barmaid in a public house in Soho. It's thought to be a sort of pay-office for Whittaker's people."

Sergeant Donovan said, "If Sammy got this photograph up at Holloman's place—"

"I don't see where else he could have got it from."

"That's right."

"Then we ought to hand it over to Scotland Yard at once."

"Scotland Yard," said Sergeant Donovan softly, lifting one corner of his mouth.

Mr. Wetherall recognized that he had got ahead of himself.

"Well—the police—somewhere safe."

The sergeant turned the photographs slowly over in his hand.

" Now look here," said Mr. Wetherall with sudden authority, " tear it in half. You can keep half if you want, but I'm going to have the rest. It's not safe here, so let's split the risk."

" Go on, Patsy," said Mrs. Donovan. " It's a good idea."

Almost reluctantly, Sergeant Donovan tore the strip down the middle. Mr. Wetherall pocketed one piece and said, " You almost put it out of my mind, what I came to tell you about. I saw Peter Crowdy on Wednesday. We had a talk. He explained one or two things that I'd been wondering about."

He told them about the Crossways scheme. It did not seem to occur to any of his listeners that they should present any moral judgment on it.

" What a boy ! " said Peggy.

" Neat, that," said the Sergeant.

" Sure, there's nothing new about it," said Mrs. Donovan. " It's a trick the boys used to play in Ireland."

" There was another thing he told me." Mr. Wetherall hoped that the switch from truth to lies did not sound quite so obvious to his audience as it did to him. " And I think it might explain, in part, why Mr. Crowdy was killed."

There was no doubt about their interest.

" It was one of the van-drivers who was a friend of Mr. Crowdy's. As I understand it, the drivers weren't in the scheme at all. They were sort of innocent agents. But this one—Peter never told me his name, and come to think of it, I don't suppose his father told it to him—suspected something.

" Eventually Mr. Crowdy took him into his confidence, and he got involved, too. The usual drill was that anything saleable—food or drink or cigarettes—was kept hidden in an old shed under one of the railway arches. Mr. Crowdy had the key. Whittaker or one of his crowd picked it up when they could and paid cash down and took it away in one of their vans. That was how it usually went.

" Only on one occasion there was a hitch—the van couldn't turn up, and there was a lot of stuff piling up in the shed, and the Crossways men were getting nervous. So, rather against his will, Whittaker let Mr. Crowdy's van-driver friend do the actual delivery. He was made to swear every sort of oath of secrecy—but, of course, he talked to Mr. Crowdy."

" That's likely enough," said Sergeant Donovan. " None of that sort can keep a secret better than a four-year-old child. Do you think that's why they killed Crowdy ? Just because he knew where this place was ? "

" Not that alone," said Mr. Wetherall. " I think he may have been sickening for a severe attack of conscience—just about ready to blow the whole works. They wouldn't have liked that anyway—but they liked it a good deal less when they realized he knew the address of their central dump."

" Yes," said Sergeant Donovan. " I expect that was one reason. Another would be that he was an old man, and couldn't hit back.

That's the sort they enjoy killing, Mr. Wetherall."

There was a bitterness in his voice that was deeper than any spite or rancour. It had gone down into his own self and become part of him.

Mrs. Donovan spoke quickly, as one who wishes to turn an awkward moment.

"Did Mr. Crowdy tell Peter where the place was?"

"That's just what he did," said Mr. Wetherall gratefully. "And Peter told me." He felt in his pocket for the plan he had drawn. "It's an old factory block, near the North Circular Road." He pointed the place out.

He had expected many different reactions to his bombshell. The one thing he had not anticipated was indifference.

"I'm afraid that's out of date," said Sergeant Donovan briskly. He got to his feet as he spoke. "We'll let you into a little secret." His glance included his mother. "We know where their place is. A friend of mine found it out for me—oh, about a week ago. The place you've got there must be the last one they used. This is near St. Pancras—over a paint factory. I've been meaning to pay them a visit for some time. What with one thing and another, I've had to put it off. Just before you came, we decided that tonight was right for it. You couldn't have a better night. I know these evening fogs. It's going to be so thick soon they couldn't stop you, not if they linked arms across the end of the road. You could crawl between their legs and they wouldn't see you."

As he spoke he was putting on an old raincoat and winding a scarf round his neck.

Mr. Wetherall's mind was racing in helpless circles like the screw of an up-ended motor-boat.

"Should I—would you like me to come with you?"

"There's no call for you to get mixed up in this," said Sergeant Donovan. He had his coat on now. It hung straight and heavy, and there was a curious bulge in both pockets.

"You've done your bit. You keep clear. Give me a quarter of an hour to draw them off, and you can walk out and go home."

Without another word, or a look behind him, he was gone, and they heard the front door shut softly.

Five minutes later, and it was one of the longest five minutes he had ever known, Mr. Wetherall had extracted himself, and was out in the street again. The fog was blinding. The nearest possible call-box would be somewhere along the Walworth Road. He broke into a shambling run.

★ ***Alone, with the fog for cover, Sergeant Donovan, grimly intent on revenge, takes the lead in the final lap of this race into danger. The fourth and last Part, which tells what happens to him, to the gang—and to Mr. Wetherall, appears in next month's Argosy, on sale August 7th. Order your copy now.***

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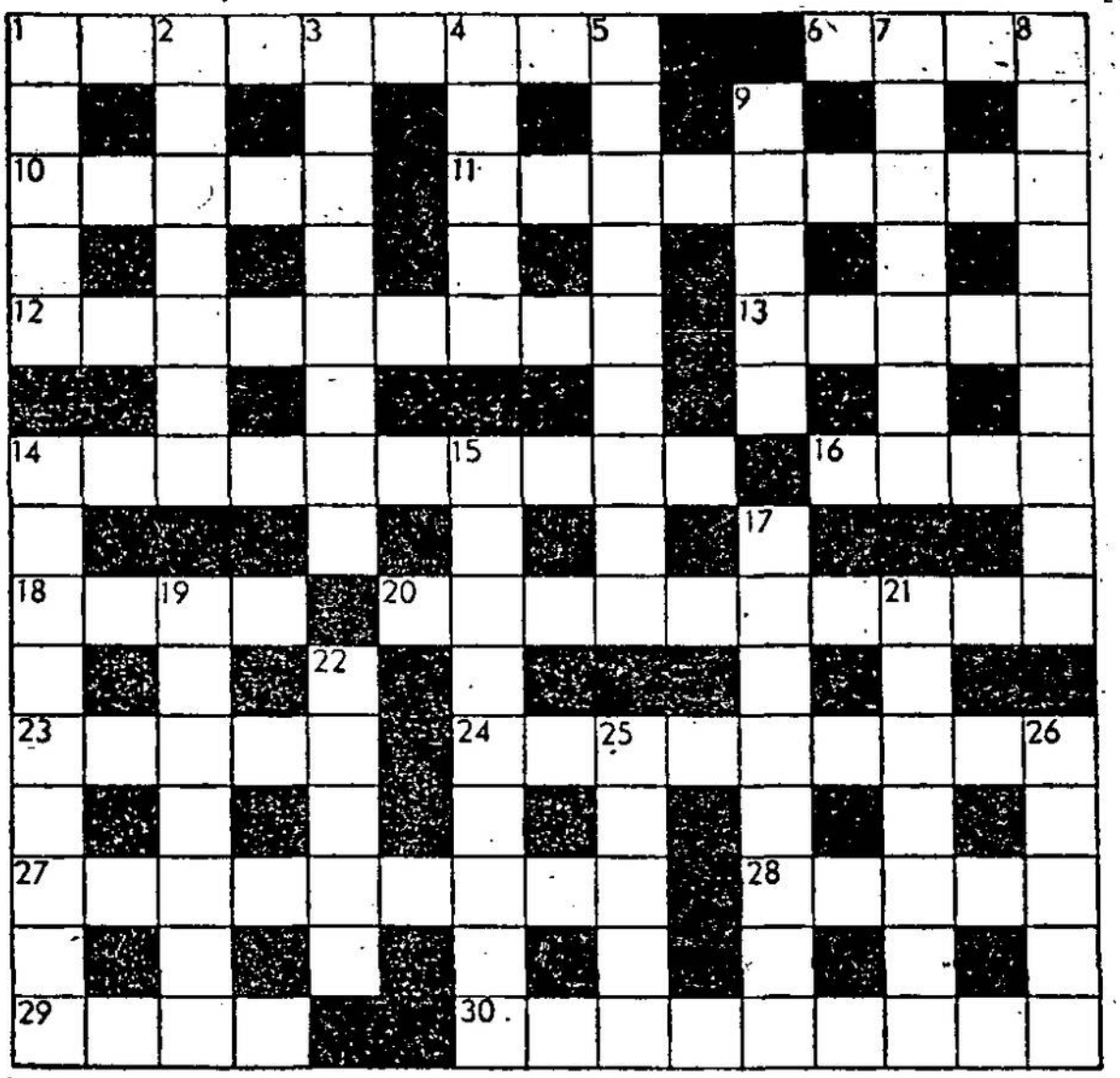

Rules of Entry on page 35

BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

Name .....

Address .....

A.3 .....

CUT ALONG THIS LINE

CLUES

Across

1 County Hospital ? (9).

6 "The divine Sairey," Swinburne called her (4).

10 Put your hat on again briefly (5).

11 A lady to the fore in the Himalayas divides to surround Napoleon and a Chaldean city (9).

12 It hums not, neither does it spin, but it might nevertheless be found in a nursery (9).

13 Palindromic lady (5).

14 "To be no Man's Rival in Love, or — in Business." (Steele) (10).

16 It takes very little to turn the pets into a nuisance (4).

18 To Kipling they were muddied and associated with flannelled fools (4).

20 But they won't build your house for nothing ! (10).

23 Once she sank ships, now she's part of them (5).

24 Quackery at the directors' meeting ? (9).

27 I at office ? Then I suppose I'd better do the job (9).

28 Not only clods catch these (5).

29 "Scorn delights and live laborious —" (Milton) (4).

30 Clearly like a fast train (9).

Down

1 Revolutionary body in bath (5).

2 All propriety, but it ends in strong drink (7).

3 Did Poles become deranged ? It looks like it (8).

4 Pain—but one must suffer to be beautiful (5).

5 Disturbing an open box he reveals an occupant, by jingo ! (9).

7 The way across a river—to put it shortly (7).

8 Dramatis personæ ? They are all in the game (9).

9 A little species followed by you and me just dissolves in froth (5).

14 Angry highway (9).

15 A dire tiara, but it can light the place up (9).

17 Take rod for signal to roast a whole ox (8).

19 "Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font : The — wakens : " (Tennyson) (7).

21 Add a hundred, and the soothsayers would turn into primitive boats (7).

22 Out in one sport, on in another, up in a third (5).

25 This side of London for bargains (5).

26 Rearrange the study, it needs a spring-cleaning (5).

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Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student 778/2119:* I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student 184/315:* As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July: I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student 181/282:* You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY:** they have offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student 591/287:* You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student 120/288:* I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student 1179/347:* I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student 1954/157:* I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD;** they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student 171/162.* I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student 1106/156.* The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student 141/76.* The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation

Yours